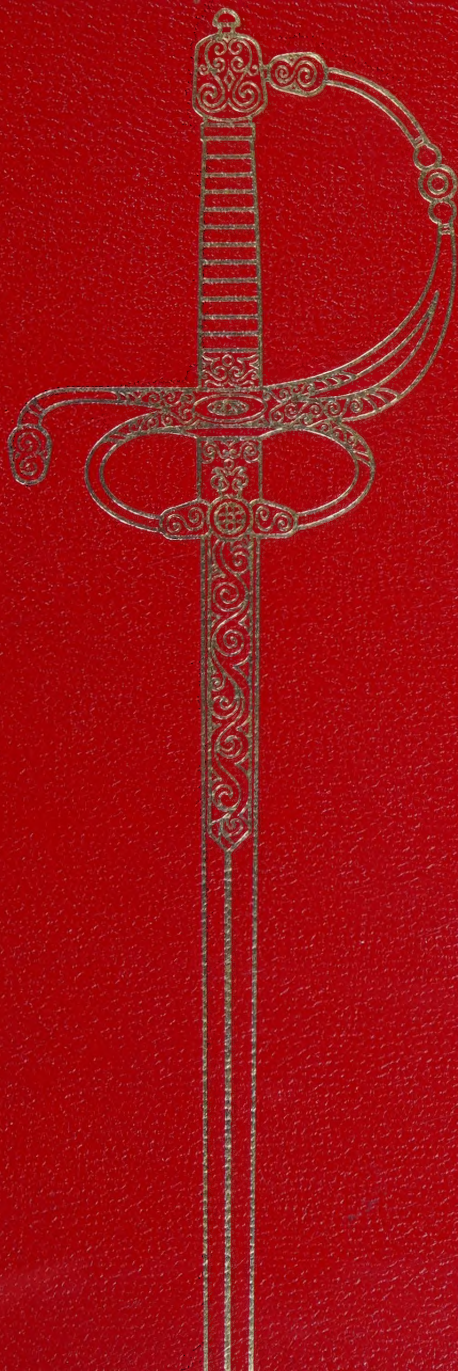


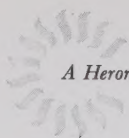








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A Heron Books Publication

THE
THREE MUSKETEERS

Volume II

ALEXANDRE DUMAS
NÉ A VILLERS-COTTERETS AISNE
LE 24 JUILLET 1802
MORT A PUTIS-SEINE-INFÉRIEURE
LE 15 DÉCEMBRE 1870



THE
THREE MUSKETEERS

ALEXANDRE DUMAS

IN TWO VOLUMES

Volume II



HERON BOOKS, LONDON

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of "The Three Musketeers", published in Paris 1846
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THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

CHAPTER I.

ENGLISH AND FRENCH.

THE hour having come, they went with their four lackeys to a spot behind the Luxembourg given up to the feeding of goats. Athos threw a piece of money to the goat-keeper to withdraw. The lackeys were ordered to act as sentinels.

A silent party soon drew near to the same enclosure, entered, and joined the musketeers. Then, according to foreign custom, the presentations took place.

The Englishmen were all men of rank ; consequently, the odd names of their adversaries were for them not only a matter of surprise, but of annoyance.

“But after all,” said Lord de Winter, when the three friends had been named, “we do not know who you are. We cannot fight with such names ; they are names of shepherds.”

“Therefore your lordship may suppose they are only assumed names,” said Athos.

“Which only gives us a greater desire to know the real ones,” replied the Englishman.

“You played very willingly with us without knowing

our names," said Athos, "by the same token that you won our horses."

"That is true, but we then only risked our pistoles ; this time we risk our blood. One plays with anybody ; but one fights only with equals."

"And that is but just," said Athos, and he took aside the one of the four Englishmen with whom he was to fight, and communicated his name in a low voice.

Porthos and Aramis did the same.

"Does that satisfy you ?" said Athos to his adversary. "Do you find me of sufficient rank to do me the honor of crossing swords with me ?"

"Yes, Monsieur," said the Englishman, bowing.

"Well ! now shall I tell you something ?" added Athos, coolly.

"What ?" replied the Englishman.

"Why, that is, that you would have acted much more wisely if you had not required me to make myself known."

"Why so ?"

"Because I am believed to be dead, and have reasons for wishing nobody to know I am living ; so that I shall be obliged to kill you to prevent my secret from roaming over the fields."

The Englishman looked at Athos, believing that he jested, but Athos did not jest the least in the world.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, addressing at the same time his companions and their adversaries, "are we ready ?"

"Yes !" answered the Englishmen and the Frenchmen, as with one voice.

"On guard then !" cried Athos.

Immediately eight swords glittered in the rays of the setting sun, and the combat began with an animosity very natural between men twice enemies.

Athos fenced with as much calmness and method as if he had been practising in a fencing-school.

Porthos, abated, no doubt, of his too great confidence by his adventure of Chantilly, played with skill and prudence.

Aramis, who had the third canto of his poem to finish, behaved like a man in haste.

Athos killed his adversary first. He hit him but once, but as he had foretold, that hit was a mortal one ; the sword pierced the heart.

Second, Porthos stretched his upon the grass with a wound through his thigh. As the Englishman, without making any further resistance, then surrendered his sword, Porthos took him up in his arms and bore him to his carriage.

Aramis pushed his so vigorously that after going back fifty paces, the man ended by fairly taking to his heels, and disappeared amid the hooting of the lackeys.

As to D'Artagnan, he fought purely and simply on the defensive ; and when he saw his adversary pretty well fatigued, with a vigorous side-thrust sent his sword flying. The baron, finding himself disarmed, took two or three steps back, but in this movement his foot slipped, and he fell backwards.

D'Artagnan was over him at a bound, and said to the Englishman, pointing his sword to his throat, " I could kill you, my Lord, you are completely in my hands ; but I spare your life for the sake of your sister."

D'Artagnan was at the height of joy ; he had realized the plan he had imagined beforehand, whose picturing had produced the smiles we noted upon his face.

The Englishman, delighted at having to do with a gentleman of such a kind disposition, pressed D'Artagnan in his arms, and paid a thousand compliments to the three

musketeers, and as Porthos's adversary was already installed in the carriage, and as Aramis's had taken to his heels, they had nothing to think about but the dead.

As Porthos and Aramis were undressing him, in the hope of finding his wound not mortal, a large purse dropped from his clothes. D'Artagnan picked it up and offered it to Lord de Winter.

"What the devil would you have me do with that?" said the Englishman.

"You can restore it to his family," said D'Artagnan.

"His family will care much about such a trifle as that! His family will inherit fifteen thousand louis a year from him. Keep the purse for your lackeys."

D'Artagnan put the purse into his pocket.

"And now, my young friend, for you will permit me, I hope, to give you that name," said Lord de Winter, "on this very evening, if agreeable to you, I will present you to my sister, Milady Clarik, for I am desirous that she should take you into her good graces; and as she is not in bad odor at court, she may perhaps on some future day speak a word that will not prove useless to you."

D'Artagnan blushed with pleasure, and bowed a sign of assent.

At this time Athos came up to D'Artagnan.

"What do you mean to do with that purse?" whispered he.

"Why, I meant to pass it over to you, my dear Athos."

"Me! why to me?"

"Why, you killed him! They are the spoils of victory."

"I, the heir of an enemy!" said Athos; "for whom, then, do you take me?"

"It is the custom in war," said D'Artagnan, "why should it not be the custom in a duel?"

"Even on the field of battle, I have never done that."

Porthos shrugged his shoulders ; Aramis by a movement of his lips endorsed Athos.

"Then," said D'Artagnan, "let us give the money to the lackeys, as Lord de Winter desired us to do."

"Yes," said Athos ; "let us give the money to the lackeys, — not to our lackeys, but to the lackeys of the Englishmen."

Athos took the purse, and threw it into the hand of the coachman. "For you and your comrades."

This greatness of spirit in a man who was quite destitute struck even Porthos ; and this French generosity, repeated by Lord de Winter and his friend, was highly applauded, except by MM. Grimaud, Bazin, Mousqueton, and Planchet.

Lord de Winter, on quitting D'Artagnan, gave him his sister's address. She lived in the Place Royale, — then the fashionable quarter, — at No. 6, and he undertook to call and take D'Artagnan with him in order to introduce him. D'Artagnan appointed eight o'clock at Athos's residence.

This introduction to Milady Clarik occupied the head of our Gascon greatly. He remembered in what a strange manner this woman had hitherto been mixed up in his destiny. According to his conviction, she was some creature of the cardinal, and yet he felt himself invincibly drawn towards her by one of those sentiments for which we cannot account. His only fear was that Milady would recognize in him the man of Meung and of Dover. Then she knew that he was one of the friends of M. de Tréville, and consequently, that he belonged body and soul to the king ; which would make him lose a part of his advantage, since when known to Milady as he knew her, he played only an equal game with her. As to the commencement of an intrigue between her and M. de Wardes, our presumptuous hero gave but little heed to

that, although the marquis was young, handsome, rich, and high in the cardinal's favor. It is not for nothing we are but twenty years old, above all if we were born at Tarbes.

D'Artagnan began by making his most splendid toilet, then returned to Athos's, and according to custom, related everything to him. Athos listened to his projects, then shook his head, and recommended prudence to him with a shade of bitterness.

"What!" said he, "you have just lost one woman, whom you call good, charming, perfect; and here you are, running headlong after another."

D'Artagnan felt the truth of this reproach.

"I loved Madame Bonacieux with my heart, while I only love Milady with my head," said he. "In getting introduced to her, my principal object is to ascertain what part she plays at court."

"The part she plays, *pardieu!* It is not difficult to divine that, after all you have told me. She is some emissary of the cardinal; a woman who will draw you into a snare in which you will leave your head."

"The devil! my dear Athos, you view things on the dark side, methinks."

"My dear fellow, I mistrust women. Can it be otherwise? I bought my experience dearly, — particularly fair women. Milady is fair, you say!"

"She has the most beautiful light hair imaginable!"

"Ah, my poor D'Artagnan!" said Athos.

"Listen to me! I want to be enlightened on a subject; then, when I shall have learned what I desire to know, I will withdraw."

"Be enlightened!" said Athos, phlegmatically.

Lord de Winter arrived at the appointed time; but Athos, being warned of his coming, went into the other

chamber. He therefore found D'Artagnan alone, and as it was nearly eight o'clock, he took the young man with him.

An elegant carriage waited below, and as it was drawn by two excellent horses, they were soon at the Place Royale.

Milady Clarik received D'Artagnan ceremoniously. Her hôtel was remarkably sumptuous, and while the most part of the English had quitted, or were about to quit, France on account of the war, Milady had just been laying out much money upon her residence ; which proved that the general measure which drove the English from France did not affect her.

"You see," said Lord de Winter, presenting D'Artagnan to his sister, "a young gentleman who has held my life in his hands, and who has not abused his advantage, although we have been twice enemies, although it was I who insulted him, and although I am an Englishman. Thank him, then, Madame, if you have any affection for me."

Milady frowned slightly ; a scarcely visible cloud passed over her brow, and so peculiar a smile appeared upon her lips that the young man, who saw and observed this triple shade, almost shuddered at it.

The brother did not perceive this ; he had turned round to play with Milady's favorite monkey, which had pulled him by the doublet.

"You are welcome, Monsieur," said Milady, in a voice whose singular sweetness contrasted with the symptoms of ill-humor which D'Artagnan had just remarked ; "you have to-day acquired eternal rights to my gratitude."

The Englishman then turned round and described the combat without omitting a single detail. Milady listened with the greatest attention, and yet it was easily to be perceived, whatever effort she made to conceal her impres-

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sions, that this recital was not agreeable to her. The blood rose to her head, and her little foot worked with impatience beneath her robe.

Lord de Winter perceived nothing of this. When he had finished, he went to a table upon which was a salver with Spanish wine and glasses. He filled two glasses, and by a sign invited L'Artagnan to drink.

D'Artagnan knew it was considered disobliging by an Englishman to refuse to pledge him. He therefore drew near to the table and took the second glass. He did not, however, lose sight of Milady, and in a mirror he perceived the change that came over her face. Now that she believed herself to be no longer observed, a sentiment resembling ferocity animated her countenance. She bit her handkerchief with her beautiful teeth.

That pretty little *soubrette* whom D'Artagnan had already observed then came in. She spoke some words to Lord de Winter in English, who thereupon requested D'Artagnan's permission to retire, excusing himself on account of the urgency of the business that called him away, and charging his sister to obtain his pardon.

D'Artagnan exchanged a shake of the hand with Lord de Winter, and then returned to Milady. Her countenance, with surprising mobility, had recovered its gracious expression; but some little red spots on her handkerchief indicated that she had bitten her lips till the blood came. Those lips were magnificent; they might be said to be of coral.

The conversation took a cheerful turn. Milady appeared to have entirely recovered. She told D'Artagnan that Lord de Winter was her brother-in-law, and not her brother. She had married a younger brother of the family, who had left her a widow with one child. This child was the only heir to Lord de Winter, if Lord de

Winter did not marry. All this showed D'Artagnan that there was a veil which concealed something ; but he could not yet see under this veil.

In addition to this, after a half-hour's conversation D'Artagnan was convinced that Milady was his compatriot ; she spoke French with an elegance and a purity that left no doubt on that head.

D'Artagnan was profuse in gallant speeches and protestations of devotion. To all the simple things which escaped our Gascon, Milady replied with a smile of kindness. The hour came for him to retire. D'Artagnan took leave of Milady, and left the saloon the happiest of men.

On the staircase he met the pretty *soubrette*, who brushed gently against him as she passed, and then, blushing to the eyes, asked his pardon for having touched him in a voice so sweet that the pardon was granted instantly.

D'Artagnan came again on the morrow, and was still better received than on the evening before. Lord de Winter was not at home ; and it was Milady who this time did all the honors of the evening. She appeared to take a great interest in him, asked him whence he came, who were his friends, and whether he had not some times thought of attaching himself to the cardinal.

D'Artagnan, who, as we have said, was exceedingly prudent for a young man of twenty, then remembered his suspicions regarding Milady. He launched into a eulogy of his Eminence, and said that he should not have failed to enter into the Guards of the cardinal instead of the king's Guards, if he had happened to know M. de Cavois instead of M. de Tréville.

Milady changed the conversation without any appearance of affectation, and asked D'Artagnan in the most careless manner possible if he had ever been in England.

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D'Artagnan replied that he had been sent thither by M. de Tréville to treat for a supply of horses, and that he had brought back four as specimens.

Milady in the course of the conversation twice or thrice bit her lips ; she had to deal with a Gascon who played close.

At the same hour as on the preceding evening, D'Artagnan retired. In the corridor he again met the pretty Kitty ; that was the name of the *soubrette*. She looked at him with an expression of kindness which it was impossible to mistake ; but D'Artagnan was so preoccupied by the mistress that he noticed absolutely nothing but her.

D'Artagnan came again on the morrow and the day after that, and each day Milady gave him a more gracious reception.

Every evening, either in the antechamber, the corridor, or on the stairs, he met the pretty *soubrette*. But, as we have said, D'Artagnan paid no attention to this persistence of poor Kitty.

CHAPTER II.

A PROCURATOR'S DINNER.

HOWEVER brilliant had been the part played by Porthos in the duel, it had not made him forget the dinner of the procurator's wife.

On the morrow he received the last touches of Mousqueton's brush for an hour, and took his way towards the Rue aux Ours with the step of a man who was doubly in favor with fortune.

His heart beat, but not like D'Artagnan's, with a young and impatient love. No; a more material interest stirred his blood. He was about at last to pass that mysterious threshold, to climb those unknown stairs by which, one by one, the old crowns of M. Coquenard had ascended. He was about to see in reality a certain coffer of which he had twenty times beheld the image in his dreams, — a coffer long and deep, locked, bolted, fastened in the wall; a coffer of which he had so often heard, and which the hands — a little wrinkled, it is true, but still not without elegance — of the procurator's wife were about to open to his admiring looks.

And then he, — a wanderer on the earth, a man without fortune, a man without family, a soldier accustomed to inns, cabarets, taverns, and restaurants, a lover of wine forced to depend upon chance treats, — he was about to partake of family meals, to enjoy the pleasures of a comfortable establishment, and to give himself up to those

little attentions which "the harder one is, the more they please," as old soldiers say.

To come in the capacity of a cousin, and seat himself every day at a good table ; to smooth the yellow, wrinkled brow of the old procurator ; to pluck the clerks a little by teaching them *bassette*, *passe-dix*, and *lansquenet*, in their utmost nicety, and winning from them, by way of fee for the lesson he would give them in an hour, their savings of a month, — all this was enormously delightful to Porthos.

The musketeer could not forget the evil reports which then prevailed, and which indeed have survived them, of the procurators of the period, — meanness, stinginess, fasts ; but as, after all, excepting some few acts of economy which Porthos had always found very unseasonable, the procurator's wife had been tolerably liberal, — that is, be it understood, for a procurator's wife, — he hoped to see a household of a highly comfortable kind.

And yet, at the very door, the musketeer began to entertain some doubts. The approach was not such as to prepossess people, — an ill-smelling, dark passage, a staircase half-lighted by bars through which stole a glimmer from a neighboring yard ; on the first floor a low door studded with enormous nails, like the principal gate of the Grand Châtelet.

Porthos knocked with his hand. A tall, pale clerk, his face shaded by a forest of virgin hair, opened the door, and bowed with the air of a man forced at once to respect in another lofty stature, which indicated strength, the military dress, which indicated rank, and a ruddy countenance, which indicated familiarity with good living.

A shorter clerk came behind the first, a taller clerk behind the second, a stripling rising a dozen years behind the third. In all, three clerks and a half, which, for the time, argued a very extensive clientage.

Although the musketeer was not expected before one o'clock, the procurator's wife had been on the watch ever since mid-day, reckoning that the heart, or perhaps the stomach, of her lover would bring him before his time.

Madame Coquenard therefore entered the office from the house at the same moment her guest entered from the stairs, and the appearance of the worthy lady relieved him from an awkward embarrassment. The clerks surveyed him with great curiosity, and he, not knowing well what to say to this ascending and descending scale, remained tongue-tied.

"It is my cousin!" cried the procurator's wife. "Come in, come in, M. Porthos!"

The name of Porthos produced its effect upon the clerks, who began to laugh; but Porthos turned sharply round, and every countenance quickly recovered its gravity.

They reached the office of the procurator after having passed through the antechamber in which the clerks were, and the study in which they ought to have been. This last apartment was a sort of dark room, littered with papers. On quitting the study they left the kitchen on the right, and entered the reception-room.

All these rooms, which communicated with one another, did not inspire Porthos favorably. Words might be heard at a distance through all these open doors. Then, while passing, he had cast a rapid, investigating glance into the kitchen; and he was obliged to confess to himself, to the shame of the procurator's wife and his own regret, that he did not see that fire, that animation, that bustle, which when a good repast is on foot prevails generally in that sanctuary of good living.

The procurator had without doubt been warned of his visit, as he expressed no surprise at the sight of Porthos,

who advanced towards him with a sufficiently easy air, and saluted him courteously.

"We are cousins, it appears, M. Porthos?" said the procurator, rising, yet supporting his weight upon the arms of his cane-chair.

The old man, wrapped in a large black doublet, in which the whole of his slender body was concealed, was brisk and dry. His little gray eyes shone like carbuncles, and appeared, with his grinning mouth, to be the only part of his face in which life survived. Unfortunately, the legs began to refuse their service to this bony machine. During the last five or six months that this weakness had been felt, the worthy procurator had nearly become the slave of his wife.

The cousin was received with resignation, that was all. M. Coquenard, firm upon his legs, would have declined all relationship with M. Porthos.

"Yes, Monsieur, we are cousins," said Porthos, without being disconcerted, as he had never reckoned upon being received enthusiastically by the husband.

"By the female side, I believe?" said the procurator, maliciously.

Porthos did not feel the ridicule of this, and took it for a piece of simplicity, at which he laughed in his large mustache. Madame Coquenard, who knew that a simple-minded procurator was a very rare variety in the species, smiled a little, and colored a great deal.

M. Coquenard had, since the arrival of Porthos, frequently cast his eyes with great uneasiness upon a large chest placed in front of his oak desk. Porthos comprehended that this chest, although it did not correspond in shape with that which he had seen in his dreams, must be the blessed coffer, and he congratulated himself that the reality was several feet higher than the dream.

M. Coquenard did not carry his genealogical investigations any further; but withdrawing his anxious look from the chest, and fixing it upon Porthos, he contented himself with saying, "Monsieur our cousin will do us the favor of dining with us once before his departure for the campaign, will he not, Madame Coquenard?"

This time Porthos received the blow right in his stomach, and felt it. It appeared likewise that Madame Coquenard was not less affected by it on her part, for she added, "My cousin will not return if he finds that we do not treat him kindly; but otherwise he has so little time to pass in Paris, and consequently to spare to us that we must entreat him to give us every instant he can call his own previously to his departure."

"Oh, my legs, my poor legs! where are you?" murmured Coquenard, and he tried to smile.

This succor, which came to Porthos at the moment in which he was attacked in his gastronomic hopes, inspired much gratitude in the musketeer towards the procurator's wife.

The hour of dinner soon arrived. They passed into the eating-room, — a large dark room situated opposite the kitchen.

The clerks who, as it appeared, had smelt unusual perfumes in the house, were of military punctuality, and held their stools in hand quite ready to sit down. Their jaws moved preliminarily with fearful threatenings.

"Indeed!" thought Porthos, casting a glance at the three hungry clerks, — for the errand-boy, as might be expected, was not admitted to the honors of the magisterial table, — "in my cousin's place, I would not keep such gormands! They look like shipwrecked sailors who have not eaten for six weeks."

M. Coquenard entered, pushed along upon his armchair

with castors by Madame Coquenard, whom Porthos assisted in rolling her husband up to the table.

He had scarcely entered when he began to agitate his nose and his jaws after the example of his clerks.

"Oh, oh!" said he; "here is a soup which is rather inviting."

"What the devil can they smell so extraordinary in this soup?" said Porthos, at the sight of a pale liquid, abundant, but entirely free from meat, on the surface of which a few crusts swam about as rare as the islands of an archipelago.

Madame Coquenard smiled, and upon a sign from her every one eagerly took his seat.

M. Coquenard was served first, then Porthos. Afterwards Madame Coquenard filled her own plate, and distributed the crusts without soup to the impatient clerks. At this moment the door of the dining-room unclosed with a creak, and Porthos perceived through the half-open flap the little clerk who, not being allowed to take part in the feast, ate his dry bread in the passage with the double odor of the dining-room and kitchen.

After the soup the maid brought a boiled fowl, — a piece of magnificence which caused the eyes of the diners to dilate in such a manner that they seemed ready to burst.

"One may see that you love your family, Madame Coquenard," said the procurator, with a smile that was almost tragic. "You are certainly treating your cousin very handsomely!"

The poor fowl was thin, and covered with one of those thick, bristly skins through which the teeth cannot penetrate with all their efforts. The fowl must have been sought for a long time on the perch, to which it had retired to die of old age.

"The devil!" thought Porthos, "this is poor work. I respect old age, but I don't much like it boiled or roasted."

And he looked round to see if anybody partook of his opinion; but on the contrary, he saw nothing but eager eyes which were devouring, in anticipation, that sublime fowl which was the object of his contempt.

Madame Coquenard drew the dish towards her, skilfully detached the two great black feet, which she placed upon her husband's plate, cut off the neck, which with the head she put on one side for herself, raised the wing for Porthos, and then returned the bird otherwise intact to the servant who had brought it in, who disappeared with it before the musketeer had time to examine the variations which disappointment produces upon faces, according to the characters and temperaments of those who experience it.

In the place of the fowl a dish of haricot beans made its appearance, — an enormous dish in which some bones of mutton that at first sight one might have believed to have some meat on them pretended to show themselves.

But the clerks were not the dupes of this deceit, and their lugubrious looks settled down into resigned countenances.

Madame Coquenard distributed this dish to the young men with the moderation of a good housewife.

The time for wine came. M. Coquenard poured from a very small stone bottle the third of a glass for each of the young men, served himself in about the same proportion, and passed the bottle to Porthos and Madame Coquenard.

The young men filled up their third of a glass with water; then, when they had drunk half the glass, they filled it up again, and continued to do so. This brought them, by the end of the repast, to swallowing a drink

which from the color of the ruby had passed to that of a pale topaz.

Porthos ate his wing of the fowl timidly, and shuddered when he felt the knee of the procurator's wife under the table, as it came in search of his. He also drank half a glass of this sparingly served wine, and found it to be nothing but that horrible Montreuil, — the terror of all expert palates.

M. Coquenard saw him swallowing this wine undiluted, and sighed deeply.

"Will you eat any of these beans, Cousin Porthos?" said Madame Coquenard, in that tone which says, "Take my advice, don't touch them."

"Devil take me if I taste one of them!" murmured Porthos to himself, and then said aloud, "Thank you, my cousin, I am no longer hungry."

There was silence. Porthos could hardly keep his countenance. The procurator repeated several times, "Ah, Madame Coquenard! accept my compliments; your dinner has been a real feast. Lord, how I have eaten!"

M. Coquenard had eaten his soup, the black feet of the fowl, and the only mutton bone on which there was the least appearance of meat.

Porthos fancied they were mystifying him, and began to curl his mustache and knit his eyebrows; but the knee of Madame Coquenard gently advised him to be patient.

This silence and this interruption in serving, which were unintelligible to Porthos, had, on the contrary, a terrible meaning for the clerks. Upon a look from the procurator, accompanied by a smile from Madame Coquenard, they arose slowly from the table, folded their napkins more slowly still, bowed, and retired.

"Go, young men! go and promote digestion by working," said the procurator, gravely.

The clerks gone, Madame Coquenard rose and took from a buffet a piece of cheese, some preserved quinces, and a cake which she had herself made of almonds and honey.

M. Coquenard knitted his eyebrows because there were too many good things. Porthos bit his lips because he saw not the wherewithal to dine. He looked to see if the dish of beans was still there; the dish of beans had disappeared.

"A positive feast!" cried M. Coquenard, turning about in his chair, "a real feast, *epulæ epulorum*. Lucullus dines with Lucullus."

Porthos looked at the bottle, which was near him, and hoped that with wine, bread, and cheese, he might make a dinner; but wine was wanting, the bottle was empty. Monsieur and Madame Coquenard did not seem to observe it.

"This is fine!" said Porthos to himself; "I am prettily caught!"

He passed his tongue over a spoonful of preserves, and stuck his teeth into the sticky pastry of Madame Coquenard.

"Now," said he, "the sacrifice is consummated! Ah! if I had not the hope of peeping with Madame Coquenard into her husband's chest!"

M. Coquenard, after the luxuries of such a repast, which he called an excess, felt the want of a siesta. Porthos began to hope that the thing would take place at the present sitting, and in that same locality; but the procurator would listen to nothing, he would be taken to his room, and was not satisfied till he was close to his chest, upon the edge of which, for still greater precaution, he placed his feet.

The procurator's wife took Porthos into an adjoining room, and they began to lay the basis of reconciliation.

"You can come and dine three times a week," said Madame Coquenard.

"Thanks, Madame!" said Porthos, "but I don't like to abuse your kindness; besides, I must think of my outfit."

"That's true," said the procurator's wife, groaning, — "that unfortunate outfit!"

"Alas, yes," said Porthos, "it is so."

"But of what, then, does the equipment of your company consist, M. Porthos?"

"Oh, of many things!" said Porthos. "The Musketeers are, as you know, picked soldiers, and they require many things useless to the Guardsmen or the Swiss."

"But yet, detail them to me."

"Why, they may amount to —" said Porthos, who preferred discussing the total to taking them one by one.

The procurator's wife waited tremblingly.

"To how much?" said she. "I hope it does not exceed —" She stopped; speech failed her.

"Oh, no," said Porthos, "it does not exceed two thousand five hundred livres. I even think that with economy I could manage it with two thousand livres."

"Good God!" cried she, "two thousand livres! Why, that is a fortune!"

Porthos made a most significant grimace; Madame Coquenard understood it.

"I wished to know the detail," said she, "because, having many relatives in business, I was almost sure of obtaining things at a hundred per cent less than you would pay yourself."

"Ah, ah!" said Porthos, "that is what you meant to say!"

"Yes, dear M. Porthos. Thus, for instance, don't you in the first place want a horse?"

"Yes, a horse."

"Well, then ! I can just suit you."

"Ah !" said Porthos, brightening, "that's well as regards my horse ; but I must have the appointments complete, as they include objects which a musketeer alone can purchase, and which will not amount, besides, to more than three hundred livres."

"Three hundred livres ? Then put down three hundred livres," said the procurator's wife, with a sigh.

Porthos smiled. It may be remembered that he had the saddle which came from Buckingham. These three hundred livres he reckoned upon putting snugly into his pocket.

"Then," continued he, "there is a horse for my lackey, and my valise. As to my arms, it is useless to trouble you about them ; I have them."

"A horse for your lackey ?" resumed the procurator's wife, hesitatingly ; "but that is doing things in lordly style, my friend."

"Ah, Madame !" said Porthos, haughtily ; "do you take me for a beggar ?"

"No ; I only thought that a pretty mule makes sometimes as good an appearance as a horse, and it seemed to me that by getting a pretty mule for Mousqueton —"

"Well, agreed for a pretty mule," said Porthos ; "you are right, I have seen very great Spanish nobles whose whole suite were mounted on mules. But then you understand, Madame Coquenard, a mule with feathers and bells."

"Be satisfied," said the procurator's wife.

"There remains the valise," added Porthos.

"Oh, don't let that disturb you," cried Madame Coquenard. "My husband has five or six valises ; you shall choose the best. There is one in particular which he

prefers in his journeys, large enough to hold all the world."

"Your valise is then empty?" asked Porthos, with simplicity.

"Certainly it is empty," replied the procurator's wife, in real innocence.

"Ah, but the valise I want," cried Porthos, "is a well-filled one, my dear."

Madame uttered fresh sighs. Molière had not written his scene in "*L'Avare*" then. Madame Coquenard was in the dilemma of Harpagon.

Finally, the rest of the equipment was successively debated in the same manner; and the result of the sitting was, that the procurator's wife should give eight hundred livres in money, and should furnish the horse and the mule which should have the honor of carrying Porthos and Mousqueton to glory.

These conditions being agreed to, Porthos took leave of Madame Coquenard. The latter wished to detain him by darting certain tender glances; but Porthos urged the commands of duty, and the procurator's wife was obliged to give place to the king.

The musketeer returned home hungry and in bad humor.

CHAPTER III.

SOUBRETTE AND MISTRESS.

MEANTIME, as we have said, despite the cries of his conscience and the wise counsels of Athos, D'Artagnan became hourly more in love with Milady. Thus he never failed to pay his diurnal court to her; and the self-satisfied Gascon was convinced that sooner or later she could not fail to respond.

One day, when he arrived with his head in the air, and as light at heart as a man who awaits a shower of gold, he found the *soubrette* under the gateway of the hôtel; but this time the pretty Kitty was not contented with touching him as he passed, she took him gently by the hand.

"Good!" thought D'Artagnan, "she is charged with some message for me from her mistress; she is about to appoint some rendezvous of which she had not courage to speak." And he looked down at the pretty girl with the most triumphant air imaginable.

"I wish to say three words to you, Monsieur Chevalier," stammered the *soubrette*.

"Speak, my child, speak," said D'Artagnan; "I listen."

"Here? Impossible! That which I have to say is too long, and above all, too secret."

"Well, what is to be done?"

"If Monsieur Chevalier would follow me?" said Kitty, timidly.

"Where you please, my dear child."

"Come, then."

And Kitty, who had not let go the hand of D'Artagnan, led him up a little dark, winding staircase, and after ascending about fifteen steps, opened a door.

"Come in here, Monsieur Chevalier," said she; "here we shall be alone, and can talk."

"And whose room is this, my dear child?"

"It is mine, Monsieur Chevalier; it communicates with my mistress's by that door. But you need not fear. She will not hear what we say; she never goes to bed before midnight."

D'Artagnan cast a glance around him. The little apartment was charming for its taste and neatness; but in spite of himself, his eyes were directed to that door which Kitty said led to Milady's chamber.

Kitty guessed what was passing in the mind of the young man, and heaved a deep sigh.

"You love my mistress, then, very dearly, Monsieur Chevalier?" said she.

"Oh, more than I can say, Kitty! I am mad for her!"

Kitty breathed a second sigh.

"Alas, Monsieur," said she, "that is too bad."

"What the devil do you see so bad in it?" said D'Artagnan.

"Because, Monsieur," replied Kitty, "my mistress loves you not at all.

"*Hein!*" said D'Artagnan, "can she have charged you to tell me so?"

"Oh, no, Monsieur; but out of the regard I have for you, I have taken the resolution to tell you so."

"Much obliged, my dear Kitty; but for the intention only, — for the information, you must agree, is not likely to be at all agreeable."

"That is to say, you don't believe what I have told you; is it not so?"

"We have always some difficulty in believing such things, my pretty dear, were it only from self-love."

"Then you don't believe me?"

"I confess that unless you deign to give me some proof of what you advance —"

"What do you think of this?"

Kitty drew a little note from her bosom.

"For me?" said D'Artagnan, seizing the letter.

"No; for another."

"For another?"

"Yes."

"His name; his name!" cried D'Artagnan.

"Read the address."

"M. le Comte de Wardes."

The remembrance of the scene at St. Germain presented itself to the mind of the presumptuous Gascon. As quick as thought he tore open the letter, in spite of the cry which Kitty uttered on seeing what he was going to do, or rather, what he was doing.

"Oh, good Lord, Monsieur Chevalier," said she, "what are you doing?"

"I?" said D'Artagnan; "nothing," and he read, —

"You have not answered my first note. Are you indisposed, or have you forgotten the glances you favored me with at the ball of Madame de Guise? You have an opportunity now, Count; do not allow it to escape."

D'Artagnan became very pale; he was wounded in his *self-love*: he thought that it was in his *love*.

"Poor dear M. d'Artagnan," said Kitty, in a voice full of compassion, and pressing anew the young man's hand.

"You pity me, little one?" said D'Artagnan.

"Oh, yes, and with all my heart; for I know what it is to be in love."

"You know what it is to be in love?" said D'Artagnan, looking at her for the first time with much attention.

"Alas, yes."

"Well, then, instead of pitying me, you would do much better to assist me in avenging myself on your mistress."

"And what sort of revenge would you take?"

"I would triumph over her, and supplant my rival."

"I will never help you in that, Monsieur Chevalier," said Kitty, warmly.

"And why not?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"For two reasons."

"What ones?"

"The first is, that my mistress will never love you."

"How do you know that?"

"You have cut her to the heart."

"I? In what can I have offended her,—I who ever since I have known her have lived at her feet like a slave? Speak, I beg you!"

"I will never confess that but to the man—who should read to the bottom of my soul!"

D'Artagnan looked at Kitty for the second time. The young girl had freshness and beauty which many duchesses would have purchased with their coronets.

"Kitty," said he, "I will read to the bottom of your soul whenever you like; don't let that disturb you." And he gave her a kiss at which the poor girl became as red as a cherry.

"Oh, no," said Kitty, "it is not me you love! It is my mistress you love; you told me so just now."

"And does that hinder you from letting me know the second reason?"

"The second reason, Monsieur the Chevalier," replied



De Wardes

Kitty, emboldened by the kiss in the first place, and still further by the expression of the eyes of the young man, "is, that in love, every one for herself!"

Then only D'Artagnan remembered the languishing glances of Kitty, her constantly meeting him in the ante-chamber, the corridor, or on the stairs, those touches of the hand every time she met him, and her deep sighs; but absorbed by his desire to please the great lady, he had disdained the *soubrette*. He whose game is the eagle takes no heed of the sparrow.

But this time our Gascon saw at a glance all the advantage to be derived from the love which Kitty had just confessed so innocently, or so boldly: the interception of letters addressed to the Comte de Wardes, news on the spot, entrance at all hours into Kitty's chamber, which was contiguous to her mistress's. The perfidious deceiver was, as may plainly be perceived, already sacrificing, in intention, the poor girl in order to obtain Milady, willy nilly.

"Well," said he to the young girl, "are you willing, my dear Kitty, that I should give you a proof of that love which you doubt?"

"What love?" asked the young girl.

"Of that which I am ready to feel towards you."

"And what is that proof?"

"Are you willing that I should this evening pass with you the time I generally spend with your mistress?"

"Oh, yes," said Kitty, clapping her hands, "very willing."

"Well, then, come here, my dear," said D'Artagnan, establishing himself in an easy-chair; "come, and let me tell you that you are the prettiest *soubrette* I ever saw!"

And he did tell her so much, and so well, that the poor girl, who asked nothing better than to believe him, did

believe him. Nevertheless, to D'Artagnan's great astonishment, the pretty Kitty defended herself resolutely.

Time passes quickly when it is passed in attacks and defences. Midnight sounded, and almost at the same time the bell was rung in Milady's chamber.

"Good God," cried Kitty, "there is my mistress calling me! Go; go directly!"

D'Artagnan rose, took his hat, as if it had been his intention to obey, then, opening quickly the door of a large closet, instead of that leading to the staircase, he buried himself amid the robes and dressing-gowns of Milady.

"What are you doing?" cried Kitty.

D'Artagnan, who had secured the key, shut himself up in the closet without reply.

"Well," cried Milady, in a sharp voice. "Are you asleep, that you don't answer when I ring?"

And D'Artagnan heard the door of communication opened violently.

"Here am I, Milady, here am I!" cried Kitty, springing forward to meet her mistress.

Both went into the bedroom, and as the door of communication remained open, D'Artagnan could hear Milady for some time scolding her maid. She was at length appeased, and the conversation turned upon him while Kitty was assisting her mistress.

"Well," said Milady, "I have not seen our Gascon this evening."

"What, Milady! has he not come?" said Kitty. "Can he be inconstant before being happy?"

"Oh, no; he must have been prevented by M. de Tréville or M. d'Essart. I understand my game, Kitty; I have this one safe."

"What will you do with him, Madame?"

"What will I do with him? Be easy, Kitty, there is

something between that man and me that he is quite ignorant of: he nearly made me lose my credit with his Eminence. Oh, I will be revenged!"

"I believed that Madame loved him."

"I love him? I detest him! An idiot, who held the life of Lord de Winter in his hands and did not kill him, by which I missed three hundred thousand livres' income."

"That's true," said Kitty; "your son was the only heir of his uncle, and until his majority you would have had the enjoyment of his fortune."

D'Artagnan shuddered to the marrow at hearing this suave creature reproach him, with that sharp voice which she took such pains to conceal in conversation, for not having killed a man whom he had seen load her with kindnesses.

"For all this," continued Milady, "I should long ago have revenged myself on him, if, and I don't know why, the cardinal had not requested me to conciliate him."

"Oh, yes; but Madame has not conciliated that little woman he was so fond of."

"What, the mercer's wife of the Rue des Fossoyeurs? Has he not already forgotten she ever existed? Fine vengeance that, on my faith!"

A cold sweat broke from D'Artagnan's brow. Why, this woman was a monster! He resumed his listening, but unfortunately the toilet was finished.

"That will do," said Milady; "go into your own room, and to-morrow endeavor again to get me an answer to the letter I gave you."

"For M. de Wardes?" said Kitty.

"To be sure; for M. de Wardes."

"Now, there is one," said Kitty, "who appears to me quite a different sort of a man from that poor M. d'Artagnan."

"Go to bed, Mademoiselle," said Milady; "I don't like comments."

D'Artagnan heard the door close; then the noise of two bolts by which Milady fastened herself in. On her side, but as softly as possible, Kitty turned the key of the lock, and then D'Artagnan opened the closet door.

"Oh, good Lord!" said Kitty, in a low voice, "what is the matter with you? How pale you are!"

"The abominable creature!" murmured D'Artagnan.

"Silence, silence, begone!" said Kitty. "There is nothing but a wainscot between my chamber and Milady's; every word that is uttered in one can be heard in the other."

"That's exactly the reason I won't go," said D'Artagnan.

"What!" said Kitty, blushing.

"Or, at least, I will go — later."

He drew Kitty to him. She had the less motive to resist, resistance would make so much noise. Therefore Kitty surrendered.

It was a movement of vengeance upon Milady. D'Artagnan believed it right to say that vengeance is the pleasure of the gods. With a little more heart, he might have been contented with this new conquest; but the principal features of his character were ambition and pride. It must, however, be confessed in his justification that the first use he made of his influence over Kitty was to try and find out what had become of Madame Bonacieux; but the poor girl swore upon the crucifix to D'Artagnan that she was entirely ignorant on that head, her mistress never admitting her into half her secrets, — only she believed she could say she was not dead.

As to the cause which was near making Milady lose her credit with the cardinal, Kitty knew nothing about it; but this time D'Artagnan was better informed than she

was. As he had seen Milady on board a vessel at the moment he was leaving England, he suspected that it was, almost without a doubt, on account of the diamond studs.

But what was clearest in all this was, that the true hatred, the profound hatred, the inveterate hatred of Milady, was increased by his not having killed her brother-in-law.

D'Artagnan came the next day to Milady's, and finding her in a very ill-humor, had no doubt that it was lack of an answer from M. de Wardes that provoked her thus. Kitty came in, but Milady was very cross with her. The poor girl ventured a glance at D'Artagnan which said, "See how I suffer on your account!"

Towards the end of the evening, however, the beautiful lioness became milder; she smilingly listened to the soft speeches of D'Artagnan, and even gave him her hand to kiss.

D'Artagnan departed, scarcely knowing what to think; but as he was a youth who did not easily lose his head, while continuing to pay his court to Milady, he had framed a little plan in his mind.

He found Kitty at the gate, and, as on the preceding evening, went up to her chamber. Kitty had been accused of negligence, and severely scolded. Milady could not at all comprehend the silence of the Comte de Wardes, and she ordered Kitty to come at nine o'clock in the morning to take a third letter.

D'Artagnan made Kitty promise to bring him that letter on the following morning. The poor girl promised all her lover desired; she was mad.

Things passed as on the night before. D'Artagnan concealed himself in his closet; Milady called, undressed, sent away Kitty, and shut the door. As the night before, D'Artagnan did not return home till five o'clock in the morning.

At eleven o'clock Kitty came to him. She held in her hand a fresh billet from Milady. This time the poor girl did not even argue with D'Artagnan; she gave it to him at once. She belonged body and soul to her handsome soldier.

D'Artagnan opened the letter and read as follows : —

“This is the third time I have written to you to tell you that I love you. Beware that I do not write to you a fourth time to tell you that I detest you.

“If you repent of the manner in which you have acted towards me, the young girl who brings you this will tell you how a man of spirit may obtain his pardon.”

D'Artagnan colored and grew pale several times in reading this billet.

“Oh, you love her still,” said Kitty, who had not taken her eyes off the young man's countenance for an instant.

“No, Kitty, you are mistaken. I do not love her, but I will avenge myself for her contempt.”

“Oh, yes, I know what sort of vengeance! You told me that!”

“What matters it to you, Kitty? You know it is you alone whom I love.”

“How can I know that?”

“By the scorn I will throw upon her.”

D'Artagnan took a pen and wrote : —

MADAME, — Until the present moment I could not believe that it was to me your first two letters were addressed, so unworthy did I feel myself of such an honor; besides, I was so seriously indisposed, that I could not in any case have replied to them.

But now I am forced to believe in the excess of your kindness, since not only your letter but your servant assures me that I have the good fortune to be beloved by you.

She has no occasion to teach me the way in which a man

of spirit may obtain his pardon. I will come and ask mine at eleven o'clock this evening.

To delay it a single day would be in my eyes now to commit a fresh offence.

From him whom you have rendered the happiest of men,
COMTE DE WARDES.

This note was in the first place a forgery ; it was likewise an indelicacy. It was even, according to our present manners, something like an infamous action ; but at that period people did not manage affairs as they do to-day. Besides, D'Artagnan from her own admission knew Milady culpable of treachery in matters more important, and could entertain no respect for her. And yet, notwithstanding this want of respect, he felt an uncontrollable passion for this woman boiling in his veins, — passion drunk with contempt ; but passion or thirst, as the reader pleases.

D'Artagnan's plan was very simple. By Kitty's chamber he could gain that of her mistress. He would take advantage of the first moment of surprise, shame, and terror, to triumph over her. He might fail, but something must be left to chance. In eight days the campaign would open, and he would be compelled to leave Paris ; D'Artagnan had no time for a prolonged love siege.

"There," said the young man, handing Kitty the letter sealed ; "give that to Milady. It is the count's reply."

Poor Kitty became as pale as death ; she suspected what the letter contained.

"Listen, my dear girl," said D'Artagnan ; "you cannot but perceive that all this must end, some way or other. Milady may discover that you gave the first billet to my lackey instead of to the count's ; that it is I who have opened the others which ought to have been opened by De Wardes. Milady will then turn you out of doors,

and you know she is not the woman to limit her vengeance."

"Alas!" said Kitty, "for whom have I exposed myself to all that?"

"For me, I well know, my sweet girl," said D'Artagnan. "But I am grateful, I swear to you."

"But what does this note contain?"

"Milady will tell you."

"Ah, you do not love me!" cried Kitty, "and I am very wretched."

To this reproach there is always one response which deludes women. D'Artagnan replied in such a manner that Kitty remained in her great delusion. Although she cried freely before deciding to transmit the letter to her mistress, she did at last so decide, which was all D'Artagnan wished. Finally he promised that he would leave her mistress's presence at an early hour that evening, and that when he left the mistress he would ascend with the maid. This promise completed poor Kitty's consolation.

CHAPTER IV.

IN WHICH THE OUTFIT OF ARAMIS AND PORTHOS IS
TREATED OF.

SINCE the four friends had been each in search of his equipments, there had been no fixed meeting between them. They dined apart from one another, wherever they might happen to be, or rather where they could. Duty likewise, on its part took a portion of that precious time which was gliding away so rapidly, — only they had agreed to meet once a week, about one o'clock, at the residence of Athos, seeing that he, in agreement with the vow he had formed, did not pass over the threshold of his door.

This day of reunion was the same day as that on which Kitty came to find D'Artagnan. Soon as Kitty left him, D'Artagnan directed his steps towards the Rue Férou.

He found Athos and Aramis philosophizing. Aramis had some slight inclination to resume the cassock. Athos, according to his system, neither encouraged nor dissuaded him. Athos believed that every one should be left to his own free will. He never gave advice but when it was asked, and even then he required to be asked twice.

"People in general," he said, "only ask advice not to follow it; or if they do follow it, it is for the sake of having some one to blame for having given it."

Porthos arrived a minute after D'Artagnan. The four friends were reunited.

The four countenances expressed four different feelings :

that of Porthos, tranquillity ; that of D'Artagnan, hope ; that of Aramis, uneasiness ; that of Athos, carelessness.

At the end of a moment's conversation, in which Porthos hinted that a lady of elevated rank had condescended to relieve him from his embarrassment, Mousqueton entered. He came to request his master to return to his lodgings, where his presence was urgent, as he piteously said.

"Is it my equipment?"

"Yes and no," replied Mousqueton.

"Well, but can't you speak?"

"Come, Monsieur."

Porthos rose, saluted his friends, and followed Mousqueton.

An instant after, Bazin made his appearance at the door.

"What do you want with me, my friend?" said Aramis, with that mildness of language which was observable in him every time that his ideas were directed towards the Church.

"A man wishes to see Monsieur at home," replied Bazin.

"A man! What man?"

"A mendicant."

"Give him alms, Bazin, and bid him pray for a poor sinner."

"This mendicant insists upon speaking to you, and pretends that you will be very glad to see him."

"Has he sent no particular message for me?"

"Yes. If M. Aramis hesitates to come," he said, "tell him I am from Tours."

"From Tours!" cried Aramis. "A thousand pardons, gentlemen; but no doubt this man brings me the news I expected." And rising also, he went off at a quick pace. There remained Athos and D'Artagnan.

"I believe these fellows have managed their business. What do you think, D'Artagnan?" said Athos.

"I know that Porthos was in a fair way," replied D'Artagnan; "and as to Aramis, to tell you the truth, I have never been seriously uneasy on his account. But you, my dear Athos, — you, who so generously distributed the Englishman's pistoles, which were your legitimate property, — what do you mean to do?"

"I am satisfied with having killed that fellow, my boy, seeing that it is blessed bread to kill an Englishman; but if I had pocketed his pistoles, they would have weighed me down like a remorse."

"Go to, my dear Athos; you have truly inconceivable ideas."

"Let it pass. What do you think of M. de Tréville telling me, when he did me the honor to call upon me yesterday, that you associated with the suspected English, whom the cardinal protects?"

"That is to say, I visit an Englishwoman, — the one I named to you."

"Oh, ay! the fair woman on whose account I gave you advice, which naturally you took care not to adopt."

"I gave you my reasons."

"Yes; you look there for your outfit, I think you said."

"Not at all. I have acquired a certain knowledge that that woman was concerned in the abduction of Madame Bonacieux."

"Yes, I understand now: to find one woman, you court another. It is the longest road, but certainly the most amusing."

D'Artagnan was on the point of telling Athos all; but one consideration restrained him. Athos was a gentleman, punctilious in points of honor; and there were in the plan which our lover had devised for Milady, he was

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sure, certain things that would not obtain the assent of this Puritan. He was therefore silent ; and as Athos was the least inquisitive of any man on earth, D'Artagnan's confidence stopped there. We will therefore leave the two friends, who had nothing important to say to each other, and follow Aramis.

Upon being informed that the person who wanted to speak to him came from Tours, we have seen with what rapidity the young man followed, or rather went before, Bazin ; he ran without stopping from the Rue Férou to the Rue de Vaugirard. On entering he found a man of short stature and intelligent eyes, but covered with rags.

"You have asked for me?" said the musketeer.

"I wish to speak with M. Aramis. Is that your name, Monsieur?"

"My very own. You have brought me something?"

"Yes, if you show me a certain embroidered handkerchief."

"Here it is," said Aramis, taking a small key from his breast and opening a little ebony box inlaid with mother-of-pearl, — "here it is. Look."

"That is right," replied the mendicant ; "dismiss your lackey."

In fact, Bazin, curious to know what the mendicant could want with his master, kept pace with him as well as he could, and arrived almost at the same time he did ; but this quickness was not of much use to him. At the hint from the mendicant his master made him a sign to retire, and he was obliged to obey.

Bazin gone, the mendicant cast a rapid glance around him in order to be sure that nobody could either see or hear him, and opening his ragged vest, badly held together by a leather strap, he began to rip the upper part of his doublet, from which he drew a letter.

THE OUTFIT OF ARAMIS AND PORTHOS.

Aramis uttered a cry of joy at the sight of the seal, kissed the superscription with an almost religious respect, and opened the epistle, which contained what follows : —

MY FRIEND, — It is the will of fate that we should be still for some time separated ; but the delightful days of youth are not lost beyond return. Perform your duty in camp ; I will do mine elsewhere. Accept that which the bearer brings you ; make the campaign like a handsome true gentleman, and think of me, who kiss tenderly your black eyes.

Adieu ; or rather, *au revoir*.

The mendicant continued to rip his garments ; and drew from amid his rags a hundred and fifty Spanish double pistoles, which he laid down on the table ; then he opened the door, bowed, and went out before the young man, stupefied by his letter, had ventured to address a word to him.

Aramis then reperused the letter, and perceived a post-script, —

P. S. You may behave politely to the bearer, who is a count and a grandee of Spain.

“Golden dreams!” cried Aramis. “Oh, beautiful life! Yes, we are young ; yes, we shall yet have happy days ! My love, my blood, my life ! all, all, all, are thine, my adored mistress !”

And he kissed the letter with passion, without even vouchsafing a look at the gold which sparkled on the table.

Bazin scratched at the door, and as Aramis had no longer any reason to exclude him, he bade him come in.

Bazin was stupefied at the sight of the gold, and forgot that he came to announce D'Artagnan, who, curious to know who the mendicant could be, came to Aramis on leaving Athos.

Now, as D'Artagnan used no ceremony with Aramis, seeing that Bazin forgot to announce him, he announced himself.

"The devil! my dear Aramis," said D'Artagnan, "if these are the prunes that are sent to you from Tours, I beg you will make my compliments to the gardener who gathers them."

"You are mistaken, friend D'Artagnan," said Aramis, always on his guard; "this is from my publisher, who has just sent me the price of that poem in one-syllable verse which I began yonder."

"Ah, indeed," said D'Artagnan. "Well, your publisher is very generous, my dear Aramis, that's all I can say."

"How, Monsieur?" cried Bazin, "a poem sell so dear as that! It is incredible! Oh, Monsieur, you can write as much as you like; you may become equal to M. de Voiture and M. de Benserade. I like that. A poet is as good as an abbé. Ah! M. Aramis, become a poet, I beg of you."

"Bazin, my friend," said Aramis, "I believe you meddle with my conversation."

Bazin perceived he was wrong; he bowed and went out.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan with a smile, "you sell your productions at their weight in gold. You are very fortunate, my friend; but take care, or you will lose that letter which is peeping from your doublet, and which also comes, no doubt, from your publisher."

Aramis blushed to the eyes, crammed in the letter, and rebuttoned his doublet.

"My dear D'Artagnan," said he, "if you please, we will join our friends; as I am rich, we will to-day begin to dine together again, expecting that you will be rich in your turn."

"My faith!" said D'Artagnan, with great pleasure. "It is long since we have had a good dinner; and I, for my part, have a somewhat hazardous expedition for this evening, and shall not be sorry, I confess, to fortify myself with a few glasses of good old Burgundy."

"Agreed, as to the old Burgundy; I have no objection to that," said Aramis, from whom the letter and the gold had removed, as by magic, his ideas of conversion.

And having put three or four double pistoles into his pocket, to answer the needs of the moment, he placed the others in the ebony box, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, in which was the famous handkerchief which served him as a talisman.

The two friends repaired to Athos, and he, faithful to his vow of not going out, took upon him to order dinner to be brought to them. As he was perfectly acquainted with the details of gastronomy, D'Artagnan and Aramis made no objection to abandoning this important care to him.

They went to find Porthos, and at the corner of the Rue Bac met Mousqueton, who, with a most pitiable air, was driving before him a mule and a horse.

D'Artagnan uttered a cry of surprise, which was not quite free from joy.

"Ah, my yellow horse," cried he. "Aramis, look at that horse!"

"Oh, the frightful brute!" said Aramis.

"Ah, my dear," replied D'Artagnan, "upon that very horse I came to Paris."

"What, does Monsieur know this horse?" said Mousqueton.

"It is of an original color," said Aramis; "I never saw one with such a hide in my life."

"I can well believe it," replied D'Artagnan, "and that

was why I got three crowns for him. It must have been for his hide, for, *certes*, the carcass is not worth eighteen livres. But how did this horse come into your hands, Mousqueton?"

"Pray," said the lackey, "say nothing about it, Monsieur; it is a frightful trick of the husband of our duchess!"

"How is that, Mousqueton?"

"Why, we are looked upon with a rather favorable eye by a lady of quality, the Duchesse de — but, your pardon; my master has commanded me to be discreet. She had forced us to accept a little souvenir, a magnificent Spanish *genet* and an Andalusian mule, which were beautiful to look upon. The husband heard of the affair; on their way he confiscated the two magnificent beasts which were being sent to us, and substituted these horrible animals."

"Which you are taking back to him?" said D'Artagnan.

"Exactly!" replied Mousqueton. "You may well believe that we will not accept such steeds as these in exchange for those which had been promised to us."

"No, *pardieu*; though I should like to have seen Porthos on my yellow horse. That would give me an idea of how I looked when I arrived in Paris. But don't let us hinder you, Mousqueton; go and perform your master's orders. Is he at home?"

"Yes, Monsieur," said Mousqueton, "but in a very ill humor. Get up!"

He continued his way towards the Quai des Grands Augustins, while the two friends went to ring at the bell of the unfortunate Porthos. He, having seen them crossing the yard, took care not to answer, and they rang in vain.

Meanwhile Mousqueton continued on his way, and crossing the Pont Neuf, still driving the two sorry animals be-

fore him, he reached the Rue aux Ours. Arrived there, he fastened, according to the orders of his master, both horse and mule to the knocker of the procurator's door ; then, without taking any thought for their future, he returned to Porthos, and told him that his commission was completed.

In a short time the two unfortunate beasts, who had not eaten anything since the morning, made such a noise in raising and letting fall the knocker that the procurator ordered his errand-boy to go and inquire in the neighborhood to whom this horse and mule belonged.

Madame Coquenard recognized her present, and could not at first comprehend this restitution ; but the visit of Porthos soon enlightened her. The anger which fired the eyes of the musketeer, in spite of his efforts to suppress it, terrified his sensitive inamorata. In fact, Mousqueton had not concealed from his master that he had met D'Artagnan and Aramis, and that D'Artagnan in the yellow horse had recognized the Béarnese pony upon which he had come to Paris, and which he had sold for three crowns.

Porthos went away after having appointed a meeting with the procurator's wife in the cloister of St. Magloire. The procurator, seeing he was going, invited him to dinner, — an invitation which the musketeer refused with a majestic air.

Madame Coquenard repaired trembling to the cloister of St. Magloire, for she guessed the reproaches that awaited her there ; but she was fascinated by the lofty airs of Porthos.

All that which a man wounded in his self-love could let fall in the shape of imprecations and reproaches upon the head of a woman Porthos let fall upon the bowed head of the procurator's wife.

"Alas," said she, "I did all for the best ! One of our

clients is a horse-dealer ; he owes money to the office, and is backward in his pay. I took the mule and the horse for what he owed us ; he assured me that they were two noble steeds."

"Well, Madame," said Porthos, "if he owed you more than five crowns, your horse-dealer is a thief."

"There is no harm in trying to buy things cheap, M. Porthos," said the procurator's wife, seeking to excuse herself.

"No, Madame ; but they who so assiduously try to buy things cheap ought to permit others to seek more generous friends." And Porthos, turning on his heel, made a step to retire.

"M. Porthos ! M. Porthos !" cried the procurator's wife. "I have been wrong ; I see it. I ought not to have driven a bargain when it was to equip a cavalier like you."

Porthos, without reply, retreated a second step. The procurator's wife fancied she saw him in a brilliant cloud, all surrounded by duchesses and marchionesses, who cast bags of money at his feet.

"Stop, in the name of Heaven, M. Porthos !" cried she. "Stop, and let us talk."

"Talking with you brings me misfortune," said Porthos.

"But tell me, what do you ask ?"

"Nothing ; for that amounts to the same thing as if I asked you for something."

The procurator's wife hung upon the arm of Porthos, and in the violence of her grief she cried out, "M. Porthos, I am ignorant of all such matters ! How should I know what a horse is ? How should I know what horse-furniture is ?"

"You should have left it to me, then, Madame, who know what they are ; but you wished to be frugal, and consequently to lend at usury."

"It was wrong, M. Porthos ; but I will repair that wrong, upon my word of honor."

"How so ?" asked the musketeer.

"Listen. This evening M. Coquenard is going to the house of the Duc de Chaulnes, who has sent for him. It is for a consultation, which will last three hours at least. Come ! We shall be alone, and can make up our accounts."

"In good time. Now you talk, my dear."

"You pardon me ?"

"We shall see," said Porthos, majestically ; and the two separated, saying, "Till this evening."

"The devil !" thought Porthos, as he walked away, "it appears I am getting nearer to M. Coquenard's strong box at last."

CHAPTER V.

ALL CATS ARE GRAY IN THE DARK.

THE evening so impatiently waited for by Porthos and by D'Artagnan at last arrived.

As was his custom, D'Artagnan presented himself at Milady's about nine o'clock. He found her in a charming humor. Never had he been so well received. Our Gascon knew, by the first glance of his eye, that his billet had been delivered, and that this billet had had its effect.

Kitty entered to bring some sherbet. Her mistress put on a charming face, and smiled on her graciously; but alas! the poor girl was so sad that she did not even notice Milady's condescension.

D'Artagnan looked at the two women, one after the other, and was forced to acknowledge that in his opinion Dame Nature had made a mistake in their formation. To the great lady she had given a heart vile and venal; to the *soubrette* she had given the heart of a duchess.

At ten o'clock Milady began to appear restless. D'Artagnan knew what she wanted. She looked at the clock, rose, re-seated herself, smiled at D'Artagnan with an air which said, "You are very amiable, no doubt, but you would be *charming* if you would only depart."

D'Artagnan rose and took his hat; Milady gave him her hand to kiss. The young man felt her press his hand, and comprehended that this was a sentiment, not of coquetry, but of gratitude because of his departure.

"She loves him devilishly," he murmured. Then he went out.

This time Kitty was nowhere waiting for him ; neither in the antechamber, nor in the corridor, nor beneath the great door. It was necessary that D'Artagnan should find alone the staircase and the little chamber. She heard him enter, but she did not raise her head. The young man went to her and took her hands ; then she sobbed aloud.

As D'Artagnan had presumed, on receiving his letter, Milady in a delirium of joy had told her servant everything ; and by way of recompense for the manner in which she had this time executed the commission, she had given Kitty a purse.

Returning to her own room Kitty had thrown the purse into a corner, where it lay open, disgorging three or four gold pieces on the carpet. The poor girl, under the caresses of D'Artagnan, lifted her head. D'Artagnan himself was frightened by the change in her countenance. She joined her hands with a suppliant air, but without venturing to speak a word. As little sensitive as was the heart of D'Artagnan, he was touched by this mute sorrow ; but he held too tenaciously to his projects, above all to this one, to change the programme which he had laid out in advance. He did not therefore allow her any hope that he would flinch ; only he represented his action as one of simple vengeance.

For the rest this vengeance was very easy ; for Milady, doubtless to conceal her blushes from her lover, had ordered Kitty to extinguish all the lights in the apartment, and even in the little chamber itself. Before daybreak M. de Wardes must take his departure, still in obscurity.

Presently they heard Milady retire to her room. D'Artagnan slipped into the wardrobe. Hardly was he concealed when the little bell sounded. Kitty went to her

mistress, and did not leave the door open ; but the partition was so thin that one could hear nearly all that passed between the two women.

Milady seemed overcome with joy, and made Kitty repeat the smallest details of the pretended interview of the *soubrette* with De Wardes when he received the letter ; how he had responded ; what was the expression of his face ; if he seemed very amorous. And to all these questions poor Kitty, forced to put on a pleasant face, responded in a stifled voice whose dolorous accent her mistress did not however remark, solely because happiness is egotistical.

Finally, as the hour for her interview with the count approached, Milady had everything about her darkened, and ordered Kitty to return to her own chamber, and introduce De Wardes whenever he presented himself.

Kitty's detention was not long. Hardly had D'Artagnan seen, through a crevice in his closet, that the whole apartment was in obscurity, than he slipped out of his concealment, at the very moment when Kitty reclosed the door of communication.

"What is that noise?" demanded Milady.

"It is I," said D'Artagnan in a subdued voice, — "I, the Comte de Wardes."

"Oh, my God, my God," murmured Kitty, "he has not even waited for the hour he himself named!"

"Well," said Milady, in a trembling voice, "why do you not enter? Count, Count," added she, "you know that I wait for you."

At this appeal D'Artagnan drew Kitty quietly away, and slipped into the chamber.

If rage or sorrow ever torture the heart, it is when a lover receives under a name which is not his own protestations of love addressed to his happy rival. D'Artagnan was in a dolorous situation which he had not



Milady

foreseen. Jealousy gnawed his heart ; and he suffered almost as much as poor Kitty, who at that very moment was crying in the next chamber.

"Yes, Count," said Milady, in her softest voice, and pressing his hand in her own, "I am happy in the love which your looks and your words have expressed to me every time we have met. I also, — I love you. Oh, to-morrow, to-morrow, I must have some pledge from you which will prove that you think of me ; and that you may not forget me, take this !" and she slipped a ring from her finger on to D'Artagnan's. D'Artagnan remembered having seen this ring on the finger of Milady ; it was a magnificent sapphire, encircled with brilliants.

The first movement of D'Artagnan was to return it, but Milady added, "No, no ! Keep that ring for love of me. Besides, in accepting it," she added, in a voice full of emotion, "you render me a much greater service than you imagine."

"This woman is full of mysteries," murmured D'Artagnan to himself. At that instant he felt himself ready to reveal all. He even opened his mouth to tell Milady who he was, and with what a revengeful purpose he had come ; but she added, "Poor angel, whom that monster of a Gascon barely failed to kill."

The monster was himself.

"Oh," continued Milady, "do your wounds still make you suffer ?"

"Yes, much," said D'Artagnan, who did not well know how to answer.

"Be tranquil," murmured Milady ; "I will avenge you, — and cruelly !"

"*Peste !*" said D'Artagnan to himself, "the moment for confidences has not yet come."

It took some time for D'Artagnan to resume this little

dialogue ; but then all the ideas of vengeance which he had brought with him had completely vanished. This woman exercised over him an unaccountable power ; he hated and adored her at the same time. He would not have believed that two sentiments so opposite could dwell in the same heart, and by their union constitute a passion so strange, and as it were, diabolical.

Presently it sounded one o'clock. It was necessary to separate. D'Artagnan at the moment of quitting Milady felt only the liveliest regret at the parting ; and as they addressed each other in a reciprocally passionate adieu, another interview was arranged for the following week.

Poor Kitty hoped to speak a few words to D'Artagnan when he passed through her chamber ; but Milady herself re-conducted him through the darkness, and only quitted him at the staircase.

The next morning D'Artagnan ran to find Athos. He was engaged in an adventure so singular that he wished for counsel. He therefore told him all.

"Your Milady," said he, "appears to be an infamous creature, but not the less you have done wrong to deceive her. In one fashion or another you have a terrible enemy on your hands."

While thus speaking Athos regarded with attention the sapphire set with diamonds which had taken, on D'Artagnan's finger, the place of the queen's ring, carefully kept in a casket.

"You notice my ring?" said the Gascon, proud to display so rich a gift in the eyes of his friends.

"Yes," said Athos, "it reminds me of a family jewel."

"It is beautiful, is it not?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes," said Athos, "magnificent. I did not think two sapphires of such a fine water existed. Have you traded it for your diamond?"

"No. It is a gift from my beautiful Englishwoman, or rather Frenchwoman, — for I am convinced she was born in France, though I have not questioned her."

"That ring comes from Milady?" cried Athos, with a voice in which it was easy to detect strong emotion.

"Her very self; she gave it me last night. Here it is," replied D'Artagnan, taking it from his finger.

Athos examined it and became very pale. He tried it on his left hand; it fitted his finger as if made for it.

A shade of anger and vengeance passed across the usually calm brow of this gentleman.

"It is impossible it can be she," said he. "How could this ring come into the hands of Milady Clarik? And yet it is difficult to suppose such a resemblance should exist between two jewels."

"Do you know this ring?" said D'Artagnan.

"I thought I did," replied Athos; "but no doubt I was mistaken." And he returned D'Artagnan the ring without, however, ceasing to look at it.

"Pray, D'Artagnan," said Athos, after a minute, "either take off that ring or turn the mounting inside; it recalls such cruel recollections that I shall have no head to converse with you. Don't ask me for counsel; don't tell me you are perplexed what to do. But stop! let me look at that sapphire again; the one I mentioned to you had one of its faces scratched by accident."

D'Artagnan took off the ring, giving it again to Athos.

Athos started. "Look," said he, "is it not strange?" and he pointed out to D'Artagnan the scratch he had remembered.

"But from whom did this ring come to you, Athos?"

"From my mother, who inherited it from her mother. As I told you, it is an old family jewel."

"And you — sold it?" asked D'Artagnan, hesitatingly.

"No," replied Athos, with a singular smile. "I gave it away in a night of love, as it has been given to you."

D'Artagnan became pensive in his turn ; it appeared as if there were abysses in Milady's soul whose depths were dark and unknown. He took back the ring, but put it in his pocket and not on his finger.

"D'Artagnan," said Athos, taking his hand, "you know I love you ; if I had a son I could not love him better. Take my advice, renounce this woman. I do not know her, but a sort of intuition tells me she is a lost creature, and that there is something fatal about her."

"You are right," said D'Artagnan ; "I will have done with her. I own that this woman terrifies me."

"Shall you have the courage?" said Athos.

"I shall," replied D'Artagnan, "and instantly."

"In truth, my young friend, you will act rightly," said the gentleman, pressing the Gascon's hand with an affection almost paternal ; "and God grant that this woman, who has scarcely entered into your life, may not leave a terrible trace in it!" And Athos bowed to D'Artagnan like a man who wishes it understood that he would not be sorry to be left alone with his thoughts.

On reaching home D'Artagnan found Kitty waiting for him. A month of fever could not have changed her more than this one night of sleeplessness and sorrow.

She was sent by her mistress to the false De Wardes. Her mistress was mad with love, intoxicated with joy. She wished to know when her lover would meet her a second night ; and poor Kitty, pale and trembling, awaited D'Artagnan's reply. The counsels of his friend, joined to the cries of his own heart, made him determine, now his pride was saved and his vengeance satisfied, not to see Milady again. As a reply, he wrote the following letter :—

ALL CATS ARE GRAY IN THE DARK.

Do not depend upon me, Madame, for the next meeting. Since my convalescence I have so many affairs of this kind on my hands that I am forced to regulate them a little. When your turn comes, I shall have the honor to inform you of it. I kiss your hands.

COMTE DE WARDES.

Not a word about the sapphire. Was the Gascon determined to keep it as a weapon against Milady, or else, let us be frank, did he not reserve the sapphire as a last resource for his outfit? It would be wrong to judge the actions of one period from the point of view of another. That which would now be considered as disgraceful to a gentleman was at that time quite a simple and natural affair, and the younger sons of the best families were frequently supported by their mistresses. D'Artagnan gave the open letter to Kitty, who at first was unable to comprehend it, but who became almost wild with joy on reading it a second time. She could scarcely believe in her happiness; and D'Artagnan was forced to renew with the living voice the assurances which he had written. And whatever might be — considering the violent character of Milady — the danger which the poor girl incurred in giving this billet to her mistress, she ran back to the Place Royale as fast as her legs could carry her.

The heart of the best woman is pitiless towards the sorrows of a rival.

Milady opened the letter with eagerness equal to Kitty's in bringing it; but at the first words she read she became livid. She crushed the paper in her hand, and turning with flashing eyes upon Kitty, she cried, "What is this letter?"

"The answer to Madame's," replied Kitty, all in a tremble.

"Impossible!" cried Milady. "It is impossible a

gentleman could have written such a letter to a woman." Then all at once, starting, she cried, "My God! can he have —" and she stopped. She ground her teeth; she was of the color of ashes. She tried to go towards the window for air, but she could only stretch forth her arms; her legs failed her, and she sank into an armchair. Kitty, fearing she was ill, hastened towards her and was beginning to open her dress; but Milady started up, pushing her away. "What do you want with me?" said she, "and why do you place your hand on me?"

"I thought that Madame was ill, and I wished to bring her help," responded the maid, frightened at the terrible expression which had come over her mistress's face.

"I faint? I? I? Do you take me for half a woman? When I am insulted I do not faint; I avenge myself!"

And she made a sign for Kitty to leave the room.

CHAPTER VI.

DREAM OF VENGEANCE.

THAT evening Milady gave orders that when M. d'Artagnan came as usual, he should be immediately admitted ; but he did not come.

The next day Kitty went to see the young man again, and related to him all that had passed on the preceding evening. D'Artagnan smiled ; this jealous anger of Milady was his revenge.

That evening Milady was still more impatient than on the preceding evening. She renewed the order relative to the Gascon ; but as before she expected him in vain.

The next morning, when Kitty presented herself at D'Artagnan's, she was no longer joyous and alert as on the two preceding days ; but on the contrary sad as death.

D'Artagnan asked the poor girl what was the matter with her ; but she, as her only reply, drew a letter from her pocket and gave it to him.

This letter was in Milady's handwriting ; only this time it was addressed to M. d'Artagnan, and not to M. de Wardes.

He opened it and read as follows : —

DEAR M. D'ARTAGNAN, — It is wrong thus to neglect your friends, particularly at the moment you are about to leave them for so long a time. My brother-in-law and myself expected you yesterday and the day before, but in vain. Will it be the same this evening ?

Your very grateful

MILADY CLARIK.

"That's all very simple," said D'Artagnan; "I expected this letter. My credit rises by the fall of that of the Comte de Wardes."

"And will you go?" asked Kitty.

"Listen to me, my dear girl," said the Gascon, who sought for an excuse in his own eyes for breaking the promise he had made Athos; "you must understand it would be impolitic not to accept such a positive invitation. Milady, not seeing me come again, would not be able to understand what could cause the interruption of my visits, and might suspect something; who could say how far the vengeance of such a woman would go?"

"Oh, my God!" said Kitty, "you know how to represent things in such a way that you are always in the right. You are going now to pay your court to her again, and if this time you succeed in pleasing her in your own name and with your own face, it will be much worse than before."

Instinct made poor Kitty guess a part of what was to happen. D'Artagnan re-assured her as well as he could, and promised to remain insensible to the seductions of Milady.

He desired Kitty to tell her mistress that he could not be more grateful for her kindnesses than he was, and that he would be obedient to her orders. He did not dare to write for fear of not being able, — to such experienced eyes as those of Milady — to disguise his writing sufficiently.

As nine o'clock sounded, D'Artagnan was at the Place Royale. It was evident that the servants who waited in the antechamber were warned, for as soon as D'Artagnan appeared, before even he had asked if Milady were visible, one of them ran to announce him.

"Show him in," said Milady, in a quick tone, but so piercing that D'Artagnan heard her in the antechamber.

He was introduced.

"I am at home to nobody," said Milady ; "observe, to *nobody*."

The servant went out.

D'Artagnan cast an inquiring glance at Milady. She was pale, and looked fatigued, either from tears or want of sleep. The number of lights had been intentionally diminished, but the young woman could not conceal the traces of the fever which had devoured her for two days.

D'Artagnan approached her with his usual gallantry. She then made an extraordinary effort to receive him, but never did a more distressed countenance give the lie to a more amiable smile.

To the questions which D'Artagnan put concerning her health, she replied, "Bad, very bad."

"Then," replied he, "my visit is ill-timed ; you, no doubt, stand in need of repose, and I will withdraw."

"No, no !" said Milady. "On the contrary, stay, M. d'Artagnan ; your agreeable company will divert me."

"Oh, oh !" thought D'Artagnan. "She has never been so kind before. On guard !"

Milady assumed the most agreeable air possible, and conversed with more than her usual brilliancy. At the same time the fever, which for an instant abandoned her, returned to give lustre to her eyes, color to her cheeks, and vermilion to her lips. D'Artagnan was again in the presence of the Circe who had before surrounded him with her enchantments. His love, which he believed to be extinct, but which was only asleep, awoke again in his heart. Milady smiled, and D'Artagnan felt that he could damn himself for that smile. There was a moment at which he felt something like remorse.

By degrees, Milady became more communicative. She asked D'Artagnan if he had a mistress.

"Alas!" said D'Artagnan, with the most sentimental air he could assume, "can you be cruel enough to put such a question to me, — to me, who, from the moment I saw you, have only breathed and sighed through you and for you?"

Milady smiled with a strange smile.

"Then you love me?" said she.

"Have I any need to tell you so? Have you not perceived it?"

"It may be; but you know the more hearts are worth the capture, the more difficult they are to be won."

"Oh, difficulties do not affright me," said D'Artagnan. "I shrink before nothing but impossibilities."

"Nothing is impossible," replied Milady, "to true love."

"Nothing, Madame?"

"Nothing," replied Milady.

"The devil!" thought D'Artagnan. "The note is changed. Is she going to fall in love with me, by chance, this fair inconstant; and will she be disposed to give me myself another sapphire like that which she gave me for De Wardes?"

D'Artagnan rapidly drew his seat nearer to Milady's.

"Well, now," she said, "let us see what you would do to prove this love of which you speak."

"All that could be required of me. Order; I am ready."

"For everything?"

"For everything," cried D'Artagnan, who knew beforehand that he had not much to risk in engaging himself thus.

"Well, now let us talk a little seriously," said Milady,

in her turn drawing her armchair nearer to D'Artagnan's chair.

"I am all attention, Madame," said he.

Milady remained thoughtful and undecided for a moment; then, as if appearing to have formed a resolution, she said, "I have an enemy."

"You, Madame!" said D'Artagnan, affecting surprise; "is that possible, my God?—good and beautiful as you are!"

"A mortal enemy."

"Indeed!"

"An enemy who has insulted me so cruelly that between him and me it is war to the death. May I reckon on you as an auxiliary?"

D'Artagnan at once perceived the ground which the vindictive creature wished to reach.

"You may, Madame," said he, with emphasis. "My arm and my life belong to you, like my love."

"Then," said Milady, "since you are as generous as you are loving—"

She stopped.

"Well?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"Well," replied Milady, after a moment of silence, "from the present time, cease to talk of impossibilities."

"Do not overwhelm me with happiness," cried D'Artagnan, throwing himself on his knees, and covering with kisses the hands abandoned to him.

"Avenge me of that infamous De Wardes," said Milady, between her teeth, "and I shall soon know how to get rid of you,—you double idiot, you animated sword-blade!"

"Fall voluntarily into my arms, hypocritical and dangerous woman," said D'Artagnan, likewise to himself, "after having abused me with such effrontery, and after

wards I will laugh at you with him whom you wish me to kill."

D'Artagnan lifted up his head.

"I am ready," said he.

"You have understood me, then, dear M. d'Artagnan," said Milady.

"I could interpret one of your looks."

"Then you would employ for me your arm which has already acquired so much renown?"

"Instantly!"

"But on my part," said Milady, "how should I repay such a service? I know these lovers. They are men who do nothing for nothing."

"You know the only reply that I desire," said D'Artagnan, — "the only one worthy of you and of me!"

And he drew nearer to her.

She scarcely resisted.

"Interested man!" cried she, smiling.

"Ah," cried D'Artagnan, really carried away by the passion this woman had the power to kindle in his heart, — "ah, that is because my happiness appears so impossible to me; and I have such fear that it should fly away from me like a dream that I pant to make a reality of it."

"Well, merit this pretended happiness, then!"

"I am at your orders," said D'Artagnan.

"Quite certain?" said Milady, with a last doubt.

"Only name to me the base man that has brought tears into your beautiful eyes!"

"Who told you that I had been weeping?" said she.

"It appeared to me —"

"Such women as I never weep," said Milady.

"So much the better! Come, tell me his name!"

"Remember that his name is all my secret."

"Yet I must know his name."

"Yes, you must ; see what confidence I have in you !"

"You overwhelm me with joy. What is his name?"

"You know him."

"Indeed."

"Yes."

"It is surely not one of my friends?" replied D'Artagnan, affecting hesitation in order to make her believe him ignorant.

"If it were one of your friends you would hesitate, then?" cried Milady ; and a threatening glance darted from her eyes.

"Not if it were my own brother!" cried D'Artagnan, as if carried away by his enthusiasm.

Our Gascon promised this without risk, for he knew all that was meant.

"I love your devotedness," said Milady.

"Alas, do you love nothing else in me?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I love you also, *you !*" said she, taking his hand.

The warm pressure made D'Artagnan tremble, as if by the touch ; that fever which consumed Milady attacked himself.

"You love me, you !" cried he. "Oh, if that were so I should lose my reason !"

And he folded her in his arms. She made no effort to remove her lips from his kisses ; only she did not respond to them. Her lips were cold ; it appeared to D'Artagnan that he had embraced a statue.

He was not the less intoxicated with joy, electrified by love. He almost believed in the tenderness of Milady ; he almost believed in the crime of De Wardes. If De Wardes had at that moment been under his hand, he would have killed him.

Milady seized the occasion.

"His name is —" said she, in her turn.

"De Wardes; I know it," cried D'Artagnan.

"And how do you know it?" asked Milady, seizing both his hands, and endeavoring to read with her eyes to the bottom of his heart.

D'Artagnan felt he had allowed himself to be carried away, and that he had committed an error.

"Tell me, tell me, tell me, I say," repeated Milady, "how do you know it?"

"How do I know it?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes."

"I know it, because yesterday M. de Wardes, in a saloon where I was, showed a ring which he said he had received from you."

"Wretch!" cried Milady.

The epithet, as may be easily understood, resounded to the very bottom of D'Artagnan's heart.

"Well?" continued she.

"Well, I will avenge you of this wretch," replied D'Artagnan, giving himself the airs of Don Japhet of Armenia.

"Thanks, my brave friend!" cried Milady; "and when shall I be avenged?"

"To-morrow — immediately — when you please!"

Milady was about to cry out, "Immediately," but she reflected that such precipitation would not be very gracious towards D'Artagnan.

Besides, she had a thousand precautions to take, a thousand counsels to give to her defender, in order that he might avoid explanations with the count before witnesses. All this was answered by an expression of D'Artagnan's. "To-morrow," said he, "you will be avenged, or I shall be dead."

"No," said she, "you will avenge me ; but you will not be dead. He is a coward."

"With women, perhaps ; but not with men. I know something of him."

"But it seems you had not much reason to complain of your fortune in your contest with him."

"Fortune is a courtesan ; favorable yesterday, she may turn her back to-morrow."

"Which means that you now hesitate?"

"No, I do not hesitate ; God forbid ! But would it be just to allow me to go to a possible death without having given me at least something more than hope?"

Milady answered by a glance which said, "Is that all?—speak, then." And then accompanying the glance with explanatory words, "That is but too just," said she, tenderly.

"Oh, you are an angel !" exclaimed the young man.

"Then all is agreed?" said she.

"Except that which I ask of you, dear love."

"But when I assure you that you may rely on my tenderness?"

"I cannot wait till to-morrow."

"Silence ! I hear my brother. It will be useless for him to find you here."

She rang the bell, and Kitty appeared.

"Go out this way," said she, opening a small private door, "and come back at eleven o'clock ; we will then terminate this conversation. Kitty will conduct you to my chamber."

The poor girl almost fainted at hearing these words.

"Well, Mademoiselle, what are you thinking about, standing there like a statue? Do as I bid you : show the chevalier out ; and this evening, at eleven o'clock—you have heard what I said."

“It appears that these appointments are all made for eleven o’clock,” thought D’Artagnan ; “that ’s a settled custom.’

Milady held out her hand to him, which he kissed tenderly.

“But,” said he, as he retired as quickly as possible from the reproaches of Kitty, — “but I must not play the fool. This woman is certainly a great liar. I must take care.”

CHAPTER VII.

MILADY'S SECRET.

D'ARTAGNAN left the hôtel instead of going up at once to Kitty's chamber, as she endeavored to persuade him to do, — and that for two reasons : the first, because by this means he should escape reproaches, recriminations, and prayers ; the second, because he was not sorry to have an opportunity of reading his own thoughts, and endeavoring, if possible, to fathom those of this woman.

What was most clear in the matter was that D'Artagnan loved Milady like a madman, and that she did not love him at all. In an instant D'Artagnan perceived that the best way in which he could act would be to go home and write Milady a long letter, in which he would confess to her that he and De Wardes were, up to the present moment, absolutely the same, and that consequently he could not undertake, without committing suicide, to kill the Comte de Wardes. But he also was spurred on by a ferocious desire of vengeance. He wished to subdue this woman in his own name ; and as this vengeance appeared to him to have a certain sweetness in it, he could not make up his mind to renounce it.

He walked six or seven times round the Place Royale, turning at every ten steps to look at the light in Milady's apartment, which was to be seen through the blinds. It was evident that this time the young woman was not in such haste to retire to her apartment as she had been the first.

At length the light disappeared. With this light was

extinguished the last irresolution in the heart of D'Artagnan. He recalled to his mind the details of the first night, and with a beating heart and a brain on fire he re-entered the hôtel and flew towards Kitty's chamber.

The poor girl, pale as death, and trembling in all her limbs, wished to delay her lover; but Milady, with her ear on the watch, had heard the noise D'Artagnan had made, and opening the door, said, "Come in."

All this was of such incredible immodesty, of such monstrous effrontery, that D'Artagnan could scarcely believe what he saw or what he heard. He imagined himself to be drawn into one of those fantastic intrigues one meets in dreams. He, however, darted not the less quickly towards Milady, yielding to that magnetic attraction which the loadstone exercises over iron.

As the door closed after them Kitty rushed towards it. Jealousy, fury, offended pride, all the passions in short that dispute the heart of an outraged woman in love, urged her to make a revelation; but she reflected that she would be totally lost if she confessed having assisted in such a machination, and above all, that D'Artagnan would also be lost to her forever. This last thought of love counselled her to make this last sacrifice.

D'Artagnan, on his part, had gained the summit of all his wishes. It was no longer a rival who was beloved; it was himself who was apparently beloved. A secret voice whispered to him, at the bottom of his heart, that he was but an instrument of vengeance, that he was only caressed till he had given death; but pride, but self-love, but madness silenced this voice and stifled its murmurs. And then our Gascon, with that large quantity of conceit which we know he possessed, compared himself with De Wardes, and asked himself why, after all, he should not be beloved for himself?

He was absorbed entirely by the sensations of the moment. Milady was no longer for him that woman of fatal intentions who had for a moment terrified him; she was an ardent, passionate mistress, abandoning herself to love which she also seemed to feel. Two hours thus glided away. When the transports of the two lovers were calmer, Milady, who had not the same motives for forgetfulness that D'Artagnan had, was the first to return to reality, and asked the young man if the means which were on the morrow to bring on the encounter between him and De Wardes were already arranged in his mind.

But D'Artagnan, whose ideas had taken quite another course, forgot himself like a fool, and answered gallantly that it was too late to think about duels and sword-thrusts.

This coldness towards the only interests that occupied her mind terrified Milady, whose questions became more pressing.

Then D'Artagnan, who had never seriously thought of this impossible duel, endeavored to turn the conversation; but he could not succeed. Milady kept him within the limits she had traced beforehand with her irresistible spirit and her iron will.

D'Artagnan fancied himself very cunning when advising Milady to renounce, by pardoning De Wardes, the furious projects she had formed.

But at the first word the young woman started, and exclaimed in a sharp, bantering tone, which sounded strangely in the darkness, "Are you afraid, dear M. d'Artagnan?"

"You cannot think so, dear love!" replied D'Artagnan; "but now, suppose this poor Comte de Wardes were less guilty than you think him?"

"At all events," said Milady, seriously, "he has de-

ceived me, and from the moment he deceived me, he merited death."

"He shall die, then, since you condemn him!" said D'Artagnan, in so firm a tone that it appeared to Milady an undoubted proof of devotion. This re-assured her.

We cannot say how long the night seemed to Milady, but D'Artagnan believed it to be hardly two hours before the daylight peeped through the window blinds, and invaded the chamber with its paleness. Seeing D'Artagnan about to leave her, Milady recalled his promise to avenge her on the Comte de Wardes.

"I am quite ready," said D'Artagnan; "but in the first place I should like to be certain of one thing."

"And what is that?" asked Milady.

"That is, whether you really love me?"

"I have given you proof of that, it seems to me."

"And I am yours, body and soul!"

"Thanks, my brave lover; but as you are satisfied of my love, you must, in your turn, satisfy me of yours. Is it not so?"

"Certainly; but if you love me as much as you say," replied D'Artagnan, "do you not entertain a little fear on my account?"

"What have I to fear?"

"Why, that I may be dangerously wounded — killed even."

"Impossible!" cried Milady, "you are such a valiant man, and such an expert swordsman."

"You would not, then, prefer a method," resumed D'Artagnan, "which would equally avenge you, while rendering the combat useless?"

Milady looked at her lover in silence. The pale light of the first rays of day gave to her clear eyes a strangely frightful expression.

"Really," said she, "I believe you now begin to hesitate."

"No, I do not hesitate; but I really pity this poor Comte de Wardes, since you have ceased to love him. I think that a man must be so severely punished by the loss of your love that he stands in need of no other chastisement."

"Who told you that I loved him?" asked Milady, sharply.

"At least, I am now at liberty to believe, without too much fatuity, that you love another," said the young man, in a caressing tone, "and I repeat that I am really interested for the count."

"You?" asked Milady.

"Yes, I."

"And why *you*?"

"Because I alone know —"

"What?"

"That he is far from being, or rather having been, so guilty towards you as he appears."

"Indeed!" said Milady, in an anxious tone; "explain yourself, for I really cannot tell what you mean."

And she looked at D'Artagnan, who embraced her tenderly, with eyes which seemed to burn themselves away.

"Yes; I am a man of honor," said D'Artagnan, determined to come to an end, "and since your love is mine, and I am satisfied I possess it, — for I do possess it, do I not?"

"Entirely; go on."

"Well, I feel as if transformed, — a confession weighs on my mind."

"A confession!"

"If I had the least doubt of your love I would not

make it ; but you love me, my beautiful mistress, do you not ? ”

“ Without doubt.”

“ Then if through excess of love I have rendered myself culpable towards you, you will pardon me ? ”

“ Perhaps.”

D'Artagnan tried with his sweetest smile to touch his lips to Milady's, but she evaded him.

“ This confession,” said she, growing paler, “ what is this confession ? ”

“ You gave De Wardes a meeting on Thursday last in this very room, did you not ? ”

“ No, no ! It is not true,” said Milady, in a tone of voice so firm, and with a countenance so unchanged, that if D'Artagnan had not been in such perfect possession of the fact, he would have doubted.

“ Do not lie, my angel,” said D'Artagnan, smiling ; “ that would be useless.”

“ What do you mean ? Speak ! you kill me.”

“ Be satisfied ; you are not guilty towards me, and I have already pardoned you.”

“ What next ? what next ? ”

“ De Wardes cannot boast of anything.”

“ How is that ? You told me yourself that that ring — ”

“ That ring I have ! The Comte de Wardes of Thursday and the D'Artagnan of to-day are the same person.”

The imprudent young man expected a surprise, mixed with shame, — a slight storm which would resolve itself into tears ; but he was strangely deceived, and his error was not of long duration.

Pale and trembling, Milady repulsed D'Artagnan's attempted embrace by a violent blow on the chest, as she sprang out of bed.

It was almost broad daylight.

D'Artagnan detained her by her nightdress of fine India linen, to implore her pardon; but she, with a strong movement, tried to escape. Then the cambric was torn from her beautiful shoulders; and on one of those lovely shoulders, round and white, D'Artagnan recognized, with inexpressible astonishment, the *fleur-de-lis*, — that indelible mark which the hand of the infamous executioner had imprinted.

“Great God!” cried D'Artagnan, loosing his hold of her dress, and remaining mute, motionless, and frozen.

But Milady felt herself denounced even by his terror. He had doubtless seen all. The young man now knew her secret, her terrible secret, — the secret she concealed even from her maid with such care, the secret of which all the world was ignorant, except himself.

She turned upon him, no longer like a furious woman, but like a wounded panther.

“Ah, wretch!” cried she, “you have basely betrayed me, and still more, you have my secret! You shall die.”

And she flew to a little inlaid casket which stood upon the dressing-table, opened it with a feverish and trembling hand, drew from it a small poniard, with a golden haft and a sharp thin blade, and then threw herself with a bound upon D'Artagnan.

Although the young man was brave, as we know, he was terrified at that wild countenance, those terribly dilated pupils, those pale cheeks, and those bleeding lips. He recoiled to the other side of the room as he would have done from a serpent which was crawling towards him, and his sword coming in contact with his nervous hand, he drew it almost unconsciously from the scabbard. But without taking any heed of the sword, Milady endeavored to get near enough to him to stab him, and did not stop till she felt the sharp point at her throat.

She then tried to seize the sword with her hands ; but D'Artagnan kept it free from her grasp, and presenting the point, sometimes at her eyes, sometimes at her breast, compelled her to glide behind the bedstead, while he aimed at making his retreat by the door which led to Kitty's apartment.

Milady during this time continued to strike at him with horrible fury, screaming in a formidable way.

As all this, however, bore some resemblance to a duel, D'Artagnan began to recover himself little by little.

"Well, beautiful lady, very well," said he ; "but, *par-dieu*, if you don't calm yourself, I will design a second *fleur-de-lis* upon one of those pretty cheeks !"

"Scoundrel, infamous scoundrel !" howled Milady.

But D'Artagnan, still keeping on the defensive, drew near to Kitty's door. At the noise they made, she in overturning the furniture in her efforts to get at him, he in screening himself behind the furniture to keep out of her reach, Kitty opened the door. D'Artagnan, who had unceasingly manœuvred to gain this point, was not at more than three paces from it. With one spring he flew from the chamber of Milady into that of the maid, and quick as lightning, he slammed to the door, and placed all his weight against it, while Kitty pushed the bolts.

Then Milady attempted to tear down the door-case, with a strength apparently above that of a woman ; but finding she could not accomplish this, she in her fury stabbed at the door with her poniard, the point of which repeatedly glittered through the wood. Every blow was accompanied with terrible imprecations.

"Quick, Kitty, quick !" said D'Artagnan, in a low voice, as soon as the bolts were fast, "let me get out of the hôtel ; for if we leave her time to turn round, she will have me killed by the servants."



The Fleur de Lys

"But you can't go out so," said Kitty; "you are naked."

"That's true," said D'Artagnan, then first thinking of the costume he found himself in, — "that's true. But dress me as well as you are able, only make haste; think, my dear girl, it's life and death!"

Kitty was but too well aware of that. In a turn of the hand she muffled him up in a flowered robe, a large hood, and a cloak. She gave him some slippers, in which he placed his naked feet, and then conducted him down the stairs. It was time. Milady had already rung her bell, and roused the whole hôtel. The porter was drawing the cord at the moment Milady cried from her window, "Don't open!"

The young man fled while she was still threatening him with an impotent gesture. The moment she lost sight of him, Milady tumbled fainting into her chamber.

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW, WITHOUT INCOMMODING HIMSELF, ATHOS FOUND
HIS OUTFIT.

D'ARTAGNAN was so completely bewildered that without taking any heed of what might become of Kitty he ran at full speed across half Paris, and did not stop till he came to Athos's door. The confusion of his mind, the terror which spurred him on, the cries of some of the patrol who started in pursuit of him, and the hooting of the people, who, notwithstanding the early hour, were going to their work, only made him precipitate his course.

He crossed the court, ran up the two flights to Athos's apartments, and knocked at the door enough to break it down.

Grimaud came, rubbing his half-open eyes, to answer this noisy summons, and D'Artagnan sprang with such violence into the room as nearly to overturn the astonished lackey.

In spite of his habitual silence, the poor lad this time found his speech.

"Holloa, there!" cried he; "what do you want, you strumpet? What's your business here, you hussy?"

D'Artagnan threw off his hood, and disengaged his hands from the folds of the cloak. At sight of the mustaches and the naked sword, the poor devil perceived he had to deal with a man. He then concluded it must be an assassin.

"Help! murder! help!" cried he.

"Hold your tongue, you stupid fellow!" said the young man; "I am D'Artagnan; don't you know me? Where is your master?"

"You, M. d'Artagnan!" cried Grimaud, "impossible!"

"Grimaud," said Athos, coming out of his apartment in a dressing-gown, "Grimaud, I thought I heard you permitting yourself to speak?"

"Ah, Monsieur, it is —"

"Silence!"

Grimaud contented himself with pointing D'Artagnan out to his master with his finger.

Athos recognized his comrade, and phlegmatic as he was, he burst into a laugh which was quite excused by the strange masquerade before his eyes, — petticoats falling over his shoes, sleeves tucked up, and mustaches stiff with agitation.

"Don't laugh, my friend!" cried D'Artagnan; "for Heaven's sake, don't laugh, for upon my soul, it's no laughing matter!"

And he pronounced these words with such a solemn air and with such a real appearance of terror, that Athos eagerly seized his hand, crying, "Are you wounded, my friend? How pale you are!"

"No, but I have just met with a terrible adventure! Are you alone, Athos?"

"*Parbleu!* who do you expect to find with me at this hour?"

"Well, well!" and D'Artagnan rushed into Athos's chamber.

"Come, speak!" said the latter, closing the door and bolting it, that they might not be disturbed. "Is the king dead? Have you killed the cardinal? You are quite upset! Come, come, tell me; I am dying with curiosity and uneasiness!"

"Athos," said D'Artagnan, getting rid of his female garments, and appearing in his shirt, "prepare yourself to hear an incredible, an unheard-of history."

"Well, but put on this dressing-gown first," said the musketeer to his friend.

D'Artagnan donned the robe as quickly as he could, mistaking one sleeve for the other, so greatly was he still agitated.

"Well?" said Athos.

"Well," replied D'Artagnan, bending his mouth to Athos's ear, and lowering his voice, "Milady is marked with a *fleur-de-lis* upon her shoulder!"

"Ah!" cried the musketeer, as if he had received a ball in his heart.

"Let us see," said D'Artagnan. "Are you *sure* that the *other* is dead?"

"*The other*?" said Athos, in so stifled a voice that D'Artagnan scarcely heard him.

"Yes, she of whom you told me one day at Amiens."

Athos uttered a groan, and let his head sink on his hands.

"This is a woman of twenty-six or twenty-eight years."

"Fair," said Athos, "is she not?"

"Very."

"Blue and clear eyes, of a strange brilliancy, with black eyelids and eyebrows?"

"Yes."

"Tall, well-made? She has lost a tooth, next to the eyetooth on the left?"

"Yes."

"The *fleur-de-lis* is small, rosy in color, and looks as if efforts had been made to efface it by the application of poultices?"

"Yes."

"But you say she is English?"

"She is called Milady, but she may be French. Lord de Winter is only her brother-in-law."

"I will see her, D'Artagnan!"

"Beware, Athos, beware. You tried to kill her; she is a woman to return you the like, and not to fail."

"She will not dare to say anything; that would be to denounce herself."

"She is capable of anything or everything. Did you ever see her furious?"

"No," said Athos.

"A tigress, a panther! Ah, my dear Athos, I am greatly afraid I have drawn a terrible vengeance on both of us!"

D'Artagnan then related all, — the mad passion of Milady and her menaces of death.

"You are right; and upon my soul, I would give my life for a hair," said Athos. "Fortunately, the day after to-morrow we leave Paris. We are going according to all probability to Rochelle, and once gone —"

"She will follow you to the end of the world, Athos, if she recognizes you. Let her, then, exhaust her vengeance on me alone!"

"My dear friend, of what consequence is it if she kills me?" said Athos. "Do you, perchance, think I set any great store by life?"

"There is something horribly mysterious under all this, Athos; this woman is one of the cardinal's spies, I am sure of that."

"In that case, take care! If the cardinal does not hold you in high admiration for the affair of London, he entertains a great hatred for you; but as, considering everything, he cannot accuse you openly, and as hatred must be satisfied, particularly when it's a cardinal's hatred, take care of yourself! If you go out, do not go out

alone ; when you eat, use every precaution. Mistrust everything in short, even your own shadow."

"Fortunately," said D'Artagnan, "all this will be only necessary till after to-morrow evening, for when once with the army, we shall have, I hope, only men to dread."

"In the mean time," said Athos, "I renounce my plan of seclusion, and wherever you go, I will go with you. You must return to the Rue des Fossoyeurs ; I will accompany you."

"But however near it may be," replied D'Artagnan, "I cannot go thither in this guise."

"That's true," said Athos, and he rang the bell.

Grimaud entered.

Athos made him a sign to go to D'Artagnan's residence, and bring back some clothes. Grimaud replied by another sign that he understood perfectly, and set off.

"All this will not advance your outfit," said Athos ; "for if I am not mistaken, you have left the best of your apparel with Milady, and she will certainly not have the politeness to return it to you. Fortunately, you have the sapphire."

"The jewel is yours, my dear Athos ! Did you not tell me it was a family jewel ?"

"Yes, my grandfather gave two thousand crowns for it, as he once told me. It formed part of the nuptial present he made his wife, and it is magnificent. My mother gave it to me, and I, fool as I was, instead of keeping the ring as a holy relic, gave it to this wretch."

"Then, my friend, take back this ring, to which I see you attach much value."

"I take back the ring, after it has passed through the hands of that infamous creature ! Never ; that ring is defiled, D'Artagnan."

"Sell it, then."

"Sell a jewel which came from my mother! I vow I should consider it a profanation."

"Pledge it, then; you can borrow at least a thousand crowns on it. With that sum you can extricate yourself from your present difficulties; and when you are full of money again, you can redeem it, and take it back cleansed from its ancient stains, as it will have passed through the hands of usurers."

Athos smiled.

"You are a capital companion; D'Artagnan," said he; "your never-failing cheerfulness raises poor souls in affliction. Well, let us pledge the ring, but upon one condition."

"What?"

"That there shall be five hundred crowns for you, and five hundred crowns for me."

"Don't dream it, Athos. I don't need the quarter of such a sum. I who am still only in the Guards; and by selling my saddles, I shall procure it. What do I want? A horse for Planchet, that's all. Besides, you forget that I have a ring likewise."

"To which you attach more value, it seems, than I do to mine; at least, I have thought so."

"Yes, for in any extreme circumstance it might not only extricate us from some great embarrassment, but even a great danger. It is not only a valuable diamond, but it is an enchanted talisman."

"I don't at all understand you, but I believe all you say to be true. Let us return to my ring, or rather to yours. You shall take half the sum that will be advanced upon it, or I will throw it into the Seine; and I doubt, as was the case with Polycrates, whether any fish will be sufficiently complaisant to bring it back to us."

"Well, I will take it, then," said D'Artagnan.

At this moment Grimaud returned, accompanied by Planchet ; the latter, anxious about his master, and curious to know what had happened to him, took advantage of the opportunity, and brought the garments himself.

D'Artagnan dressed himself, and Athos did the same. When the two were ready to go out, the latter made Grimaud the sign of a man taking aim, and the lackey immediately took down his musketoon, and prepared to follow his master.

They arrived without accident at the Rue des Fossoyeurs. Bonacieux was standing at the door, and looked at D'Artagnan hatefully.

"Make haste, dear lodger," said he ; "there is a very pretty girl waiting for you upstairs ; and you know women don't like to be kept waiting."

"That's Kitty !" said D'Artagnan to himself, and darted into the passage.

Sure enough ! Upon the landing leading to the chamber, and crouching against the door, he found the poor girl, all in a tremble. As soon as she perceived him, she cried, "You have promised your protection ; you have promised to save me from her anger. Remember, it is you who have ruined me !"

"Yes, yes, to be sure, Kitty," said D'Artagnan ; "be at ease, my girl. But what happened after my departure ?"

"How can I tell !" said Kitty. "The lackeys were brought by the cries she made. She was mad with passion. There exist no imprecations she did not pour out against you. Then I thought she would remember it was through my chamber you had penetrated hers, and that then she would suppose I was your accomplice ; so I took what little money I had and the best of my things, and I got away."

"Poor dear girl! But what can I do with you? I am going away the day after to-morrow."

"Do what you please, Monsieur Chevalier. Help me out of Paris; help me out of France!"

"I cannot take you, however, to the siege of Rochelle," said D'Artagnan.

"No; but you can place me in one of the provinces with some lady of your acquaintance, — in your own country, for instance."

"My dear little love! In my country the ladies do without chambermaids. But stop! I can manage your business for you. Planchet, go and find Aramis. Request him to come here directly. We have something very important to say to him."

"I understand," said Athos; "but why not Porthos? I should have thought that his duchess —"

"Oh, Porthos's duchess is dressed by her husband's clerks," said D'Artagnan, laughing. "Besides, Kitty would not like to live in the Rue aux Ours. Is n't it so, Kitty?"

"I do not care where I live," said Kitty, "provided I am well concealed, and nobody knows where I am."

"Meanwhile, Kitty, when we are about to separate, and you are no longer jealous of me —"

"Monsieur Chevalier, far off or near," said Kitty, "I shall always love you."

"Where the devil will constancy niche itself next?" murmured Athos.

"And I also," said D'Artagnan, — "I also. I shall always love you; be sure of that. But now, answer me. I attach great importance to the question I am about to put to you. Did you never hear talk of a young woman who was carried off one night?"

"There now! Oh, Monsieur Chevalier, do you love that woman still?"

THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

"No, no ; it is one of my friends who loves her, — M. Athos, this gentleman here."

"I?" cried Athos, with an accent like that of a man who perceives he is about to tread upon an adder.

"You, to be sure!" said D'Artagnan, pressing Athos's hand. "You know the interest we both take in this poor little Madame Bonacieux. Besides, Kitty will tell nothing; will you, Kitty? You understand, my dear girl," continued D'Artagnan, "she is the wife of that frightful baboon you saw at the door as you came in."

"Oh, my God! You remind me of my fright! If he should have known me again!"

"How? know you again? Did you ever see that man before?"

"He came twice to Milady's."

"That's it. About what time?"

"Why, about fifteen or eighteen days ago."

"Exactly so."

"And yesterday evening he came again."

"Yesterday evening?"

"Yes, just before you came."

"My dear Athos, we are enveloped in a network of spies. And do you believe he knew you again, Kitty?"

"I pulled down my hood as soon as I saw him, but perhaps it was too late."

"Go down, Athos, — he mistrusts you less than me, — and see if he be still at his door."

Athos went down and returned immediately.

"He is gone," said he, "and the house-door is shut."

"He is gone to make his report, and to say that all the pigeons are at this moment in the dovecot."

"Well, then, let us all fly," said Athos, "and leave nobody here but Planchet to bring us news."

"A minute. Aramis, whom we have sent for!"

"That's true," said Athos; "we must wait for Aramis." At that moment Aramis entered.

The matter was all explained to him, and the friends gave him to understand that among all his high connections he must find a place for Kitty.

Aramis reflected for a minute, and then said, coloring, "Will it be really rendering you a service, D'Artagnan?"

"I shall be grateful to you all my life."

"Very well. Madame de Bois-Tracy asked me, for one of her friends who resides in the provinces, I believe, for a trustworthy maid. If you can, my dear D'Artagnan, answer for Mademoiselle —"

"Oh, Monsieur, be assured that I shall be entirely devoted to the person who will give me the means of quitting Paris."

"Then," said Aramis, "this falls out very well."

He placed himself at the table and wrote a little note which he sealed with a ring, and gave the billet to Kitty.

"And now, my dear girl," said D'Artagnan, "you know that it is not good for any of us to be here. Therefore let us separate. We shall meet again in better days."

"And whenever we find each other, in whatever place it may be," said Kitty, "you will find me loving you as I love you to-day."

"Dicers' oaths!" said Athos, while D'Artagnan went to conduct Kitty downstairs.

An instant afterwards the three young men separated, agreeing to meet again at four o'clock with Athos, and leaving Planchet to guard the house.

Aramis returned home, and Athos and D'Artagnan busied themselves about pledging the sapphire.

As the Gascon had foreseen, they easily obtained three hundred pistoles on the ring. Still further, the Jew told

them that if they would sell it to him, as it would make a magnificent pendant for ear-rings, he would give five hundred pistoles for it.

Athos and D'Artagnan, with the activity of two soldiers, and the knowledge of two connoisseurs, hardly required three hours to purchase the entire equipment of the musketeer. Besides, Athos was very easy, and a noble to his fingers' ends. When a thing suited him he paid the price demanded, without thinking to ask for any abatement. D'Artagnan would have remonstrated at this; but Athos put his hand upon his shoulder, with a smile, and D'Artagnan understood that it was all very well for such a little Gascon gentleman as himself to drive a bargain, but not for a man who had the bearing of a prince. The musketeer met with a superb Andalusian horse, black as jet, nostrils of fire, legs clean and elegant, rising six years. He examined him, and found him sound and without blemish. They asked a thousand livres for him.

He might perhaps have been bought for less; but while D'Artagnan was discussing the price with the dealer, Athos was counting out the money on the table.

Grimaud had a stout, short Picard cob, which cost three hundred livres.

But when the saddle and arms for Grimaud were purchased, Athos had not a sou left of his hundred and fifty pistoles. D'Artagnan offered his friend a part of his share which he should return when convenient.

But Athos only replied to this proposal by shrugging his shoulders.

"How much did the Jew say he would give for the sapphire if he purchased it?" said Athos.

"Five hundred pistoles."

"That is to say, two hundred more, — a hundred pistoles for you and a hundred pistoles for me. Well, now, that

would be a real fortune to us, my friend ; let us go back to the Jew's again."

"What ! will you —"

"This ring would certainly only recall very bitter remembrances ; then we shall never be masters of three hundred pistoles to redeem it, so that we really should lose two hundred pistoles by the bargain. Go and tell him the ring is his, D'Artagnan, and bring back the two hundred pistoles with you."

"Reflect, Athos !"

"Ready money is needful for the present time, and we must learn how to make sacrifices. Go, D'Artagnan, go ; Grimaud will accompany you with his musketoon."

A half-hour afterwards, D'Artagnan returned with the two thousand livres, and without having met with any accident.

It was thus Athos found at home resources which he did not expect.

CHAPTER IX.

A VISION.

AT four o'clock the four friends were all assembled with Athos. Their anxiety about their outfit had all disappeared, and each countenance only preserved the expression of its own secret disquiet, — for behind all present happiness is concealed a fear for the future.

Suddenly Planchet entered, bringing two letters for D'Artagnan.

The one was a little billet, genteelly folded, with a pretty seal in green wax on which was impressed a dove bearing a green branch.

The other was a large square epistle, resplendent with the terrible arms of his Eminence the cardinal duke.

At the sight of the little letter the heart of D'Artagnan bounded, for he believed he recognized the handwriting, and although he had seen that writing but once, the memory of it remained at the bottom of his heart.

He therefore seized the little epistle, and opened it eagerly.

"Be," said the letter, "on Thursday next, at from six to seven o'clock in the evening, on the road to Chaillot, and look carefully into the carriages that pass; but if you have any consideration for your own life, or that of those who love you, do not speak a single word, do not make a movement which may lead any one to believe you have recognized her who exposes herself to everything for the sake of seeing you but for an instant."

No signature.

"That's a snare," said Athos ; "don't go, D'Artagnan."

"And yet," replied D'Artagnan, "I think I recognize the writing."

"It may be counterfeit," said Athos. "Between six and seven o'clock the road of Chaillot is quite deserted ; you might as well go and ride in the forest of Bondy."

"But suppose we all go," said D'Artagnan ; "what the devil ! they won't devour us all four, four lackeys, horses, arms, and all !"

"And besides, it will be a chance for displaying our new equipments," said Porthos.

"But if it is a woman who writes," said Aramis, "and that woman desires not to be seen, remember, you compromise her, D'Artagnan ; which is not the part of a gentleman."

"We will remain in the background," said Porthos, "and he will advance alone."

"Yes ; but a pistol shot is easily fired from a carriage which goes at a gallop."

"Bah !" said D'Artagnan, "they will miss me ; if they fire we will ride after the carriage, and exterminate those who may be in it. They must be enemies."

"He is right," said Porthos ; "battle. Besides, we must try our new arms."

"Bah, let us enjoy that pleasure," said Aramis, with his mild and careless manner.

"As you please," said Athos.

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "it is half-past four, and we have scarcely time to be on the road of Chaillot by six."

"Besides, if we go out too late, nobody will see us," said Porthos, "and that will be a pity. Let us get ready, gentlemen."

"But this second letter," said Athos, "you forget that; it appears to me, however, that the seal denotes that it deserves to be opened. For my part, I declare, D'Artagnan, I think it of much more consequence than the little piece of waste paper you have so cunningly slipped into your bosom."

D'Artagnan blushed.

"Well," said he, "let us see, gentlemen, what are his Eminence's commands," and D'Artagnan unsealed the letter and read, —

M. d'Artagnan, of the king's Guards, company D'Essart, is expected at the Palais-Cardinal this evening, at eight o'clock.

LA HOUDINIÈRE, *Captain of the Guards.*

"The devil!" said Athos; "here's a rendezvous much more serious than the other."

"I will go to the second after attending the first," said D'Artagnan. "One is for seven o'clock, and the other for eight; there will be time for both."

"Hum! I would not go at all," said Aramis. "A gallant knight cannot decline a rendezvous with a lady; but a prudent gentleman may excuse himself from not waiting on his Eminence, particularly when he has reason to believe he is not invited to make his compliments."

"I am of Aramis's opinion," said Porthos.

"Gentlemen," replied D'Artagnan, "I have already received by M. de Cavois a similar invitation from his Eminence. I neglected it, and on the morrow a serious misfortune happened to me, — Constance disappeared. Whatever may ensue, I will go."

"If you are determined," said Athos, "do so."

"But the Bastille?" said Aramis.

"Bah! you will get me out, if they put me there," said D'Artagnan.

"To be sure we will," replied Aramis and Porthos, with admirable promptness and decision, as if that were the simplest thing in the world, — "to be sure we will get you out; but meantime, as we are to set off the day after to-morrow, you would do much better not to risk this Bastille."

"Let us do better than that," said Athos; "do not let us leave him during the whole evening. Let each of us wait at a gate of the palace with three musketeers behind him; if we see a close carriage, at all suspicious in appearance, come out, let us fall upon it. It is a long time since we have had a skirmish with the Guards of Monsieur the Cardinal; M. de Tréville must think us dead."

"To a certainty, Athos," said Aramis, "you were meant to be a general of the army! What do you think of the plan, gentlemen?"

"Admirable!" replied the young men in chorus.

"Well," said Porthos, "I will run to the hôtel, and engage our comrades to hold themselves in readiness by eight o'clock; the rendezvous, the Place du Palais-Cardinal. Meantime, you see that the lackeys saddle the horses."

"I have no horse," said D'Artagnan; "but that is of no consequence, I can take one of M. de Tréville's."

"That is not worth while," said Aramis, "you can have one of mine."

"One of yours! how many have you, then?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Three," replied Aramis, smiling.

"*Certes*," cried Athos, "you are the best mounted poet of France or Navarre."

"Well, my dear Aramis, you don't want three horses? I cannot comprehend what induced you to buy three!"

"Therefore I only purchased two," said Aramis.

"The third then fell from the clouds, I suppose?"

THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

"No, the third was brought to me this very morning by a groom out of livery, who would not tell me in whose service he was, and who said he had received orders from his master."

"Or his mistress," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"That makes no difference," said Aramis, coloring; "and who affirmed, as I said, that he had received orders from his master or mistress to place the horse in my stable, without informing me whence it came."

"It is only to poets that such things happen," said Athos, gravely.

"Well, in that case, we can manage famously," said D'Artagnan; "which of the two horses will you ride, — that which you bought, or the one that was given to you?"

"That which was given to me, assuredly. You cannot for a moment imagine, D'Artagnan, that I would commit such an offence towards —"

"The unknown giver," interrupted D'Artagnan.

"Or the mysterious benefactress," said Athos.

"The one you bought will then become useless to you?"

"Nearly so."

"And you selected it yourself?"

"With the greatest care. The safety of the horseman, you know, depends almost always upon the goodness of his horse."

"Well, transfer it to me at the price it cost you?"

"I was going to make you the offer, my dear D'Artagnan, giving you all the time necessary for repaying me such a trifle."

"How much did it cost you?"

"Eight hundred livres."

"Here are forty double pistoles, my dear friend," said

D'Artagnan, taking the sum from his pocket ; " I know that is the coin in which you were paid for your poems."

" You are rich, then ? " said Aramis.

" Rich ? Richest, my dear fellow ! "

And D'Artagnan chinked the remainder of his pistoles in his pocket.

" Send your saddle, then, to the hôtel of the Musketeers, and your horse can be brought back with ours."

" Very well ; but it is already five o'clock, so make haste."

A quarter of an hour afterwards Porthos appeared at the end of the Rue Férou on a very handsome *genet*. Mousqueton followed him upon an Auvergne horse, small, but very handsome. Porthos was resplendent with joy and pride.

At the same time, Aramis made his appearance at the other end of the street upon a superb English charger. Bazin followed him upon a roan, holding by the halter a vigorous Mecklenburg horse ; this was D'Artagnan's mount.

The two musketeers met at the gate. Athos and D'Artagnan watched their approach from the window.

" The devil ! " cried Aramis, " you have a magnificent horse there, Porthos."

" Yes," replied Porthos, " it is the one that ought to have been sent to me at first. A bad joke of the husband's substituted the other ; but the husband has been punished since, and I have obtained full satisfaction."

Planchet and Grimaud appeared in their turn, leading their masters' steeds. D'Artagnan and Athos put themselves into saddle with their companions, and all four set forward ; Athos upon a horse he owed to a woman, Aramis on a horse he owed to his mistress, Porthos on a horse he owed to his procurator's wife, and D'Artagnan on a

horse he owed to his good fortune, — the best mistress possible.

The lackeys followed.

As Porthos had foreseen, the cavalcade produced a good effect ; and if Madame Coquenard had met Porthos, and seen what a superb appearance he made upon his handsome Spanish *genet*, she would not have regretted the bleeding she had inflicted upon the strong box of her husband.

Near the Louvre the four friends met with M. de Tréville, who was returning from St. Germain ; he stopped them to offer his compliments upon their appointments, which in an instant drew round them a hundred gapers.

D'Artagnan profited by the circumstance to speak to M. de Tréville of the letter with the great red seal and the cardinal's arms. It is well understood that he did not breathe a word about the other.

M. de Tréville approved of the resolution he had adopted, and assured him that if on the morrow he did not appear, he himself would undertake to find him, let him be where he might.

At this moment the clock of La Samaritaine struck six ; the four friends pleaded an engagement, and took leave of M. de Tréville.

A short gallop brought them to the road of Chaillot ; the day began to decline, carriages were passing and re-passing. D'Artagnan, keeping at some distance from his friends, darted a scrutinizing glance into every carriage that appeared, but saw no face with which he was acquainted.

At length, after waiting a quarter of an hour, and just as twilight was beginning to thicken, a carriage appeared, coming at a quick pace on the road of Sèvres. A presentiment instantly told D'Artagnan that this carriage contained the person who had appointed the rendezvous ; the young

man was himself astonished to find his heart beat so violently. Almost instantly a female head was put out at the window, with two fingers placed upon her mouth, either to enjoin silence, or to send him a kiss. D'Artagnan uttered a slight cry of joy ; this woman, or rather this apparition, — for the carriage passed with the rapidity of a vision, — was Madame Bonacieux.

By an involuntary movement, and in spite of the injunction given, D'Artagnan put his horse into a gallop, and in a few strides overtook the carriage ; but the window was hermetically closed, the vision had disappeared.

D'Artagnan then remembered the injunction : “ If you value your own life, or that of those who love you, remain motionless, and as if you had seen nothing.”

He stopped, therefore, trembling not for himself, but for the poor woman who had evidently exposed herself to great danger by appointing this rendezvous.

The carriage pursued its way, still going at a great pace, till it dashed into Paris, and disappeared.

D'Artagnan remained fixed to the spot, astounded, and not knowing what to think. If it was Madame Bonacieux, and if she was returning to Paris, why this fugitive rendezvous, why this simple exchange of a glance, why this lost kiss ? If, on the other side, it was not she, which was still quite possible, — for the little light that remained rendered a mistake easy, — if it was not she, might it not be the commencement of some plot against him through the allurements of this woman, for whom his love was known ?

His three companions joined him. All had plainly seen a woman's head appear at the window, but none of them, except Athos, knew Madame Bonacieux. The opinion of Athos was that it was indeed she ; but less preoccupied by that pretty face than D'Artagnan, he had fancied he saw a second head, a man's head, inside the carriage.

THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

"If that be the case," said D'Artagnan, "they are doubtless transporting her from one prison to another. But what can they intend to do with the poor creature, and how shall I ever meet her again?"

"Friend," said Athos, gravely, "remember that it is the dead alone with whom we are not likely to meet again on this earth. You know something of that, as well as I do, I think. Now, if your mistress is not dead, if it is she we have just seen, you will meet with her again some day or other. And perhaps, my God!" added he, with that misanthropic tone which was peculiar to him, "perhaps sooner than you wish."

Half-past seven had sounded. The carriage was twenty minutes behind the time appointed. D'Artagnan's friends reminded him that he had a visit to pay, but at the same time bidding him observe that there was yet time to retract.

But D'Artagnan was at the same time impetuous and curious. He had made up his mind that he would go to the Palais-Cardinal, and that he would learn what his Eminence had to say to him. Nothing could turn him from his purpose.

They reached the Rue St. Honoré, and in the Place du Palais-Cardinal they found the twelve invited musketeers, walking about in expectation of their comrades. There only they explained to them the matter in hand.

D'Artagnan was well known among the honorable corps of the king's Musketeers, in which it was known he would one day take his place; he was considered beforehand as a comrade. It resulted from these antecedents that every one entered heartily into the purpose for which they met; besides, it would not be unlikely that they would have an opportunity of playing either the cardinal or his people an ill turn, and for such expeditions these worthy gentlemen were always ready.

Athos divided them into three groups, assumed the command of one, gave the second to Aramis, and the third to Porthos; and then each group went and took their watch near an entrance.

D'Artagnan, on his part, entered boldly at the principal gate.

Although he felt himself ably supported, the young man was not without a little uneasiness as he ascended the great staircase, step by step. His conduct towards Milady bore a strong resemblance to treachery, and he was very suspicious of the political relations which existed between that woman and the cardinal. Still further, De Wardes, whom he had treated so ill, was one of the tools of his Eminence; and D'Artagnan knew that while his Eminence was terrible to his enemies, he was strongly attached to his friends.

"If De Wardes has related all our affair to the cardinal, which is not to be doubted, and if he has recognized me, as is probable, I may consider myself almost as a condemned man," said D'Artagnan, shaking his head. "But why has he waited till now? That's all plain enough. Milady has laid her complaint against me with that hypocritical grief which renders her so interesting, and this last offence has made the cup overflow.

"Fortunately," added he, "my good friends are down yonder, and they will not allow me to be carried away without a struggle. Nevertheless, M. de Tréville's company of Musketeers alone cannot maintain a war against the cardinal, who disposes of the forces of all France, and before whom the queen is without power and the king without will. D'Artagnan, my friend, you are brave, you are prudent, you have excellent qualities; but the women will ruin you!"

He came to this melancholy conclusion as he entered

the antechamber. He placed his letter in the hands of the usher on duty, who led him into the waiting-room and passed on into the interior of the palace.

In this waiting-room were five or six of the cardinal's Guards, who recognized D'Artagnan, and knowing that it was he who had wounded Jussac, they looked upon him with a smile of singular meaning.

This smile appeared to D'Artagnan to be of bad augury. Only, as our Gascon was not easily intimidated, or rather, thanks to a great pride natural to the men of his country, he did not allow one easily to see what was passing in his mind when that which was passing at all resembled fear, he placed himself haughtily in front of Messieurs the Guards, and waited with his hand on his hip, in an attitude by no means deficient in majesty.

The usher returned and made a sign to D'Artagnan to follow him. It appeared to the young man that the guards, on seeing him depart, chuckled among themselves.

He traversed a corridor, crossed a grand saloon, entered a library, and found himself in the presence of a man seated at a desk and writing.

The usher introduced him, and retired without speaking a word. D'Artagnan remained standing and examined this man.

D'Artagnan at first believed that he had to do with some judge examining his papers; but he perceived that the man at the desk wrote, or rather corrected, lines of unequal length, scanning the words on his fingers. He saw then that he was with a poet. At the end of an instant the poet closed his manuscript, upon the cover of which was written "Mirame, a Tragedy in Five Acts," and raised his head.

D'Artagnan recognized the cardinal.

CHAPTER X.

A TERRIBLE VISION.

THE cardinal leaned his elbow on his manuscript, his cheek upon his hand, and looked intently at the young man for a moment. No one had a more searching eye than the Cardinal de Richelieu, and D'Artagnan felt this glance run through his veins like a fever.

He however kept a good countenance, holding his hat in his hand and awaiting the good pleasure of his Eminence, without too much assurance, but also without too much humility.

"Monsieur," said the cardinal, "are you a D'Artagnan from Béarn?"

"Yes, Monseigneur," replied the young man.

"There are several branches of the D'Artagnans at Tarbes and in its environs," said the cardinal; "to which do you belong?"

"I am the son of him who served in the Religious Wars under the great King Henry, the father of his gracious Majesty."

"That is well. It is you who set out, seven or eight months ago, from your country to seek your fortune in the capital?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"You came through Meung, where something befell you. I don't very well know what, but still something."

"Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, "this was what happened to me —"

"Never mind, never mind!" resumed the cardinal, with a smile which indicated that he knew the story as well as he who wished to relate it. "You were recommended to M. de Tréville, were you not?"

"Yes, Monseigneur; but in that unfortunate affair at Meung —"

"The letter was lost," replied his Eminence; "yes, I know that. But M. de Tréville is a skilful physiognomist, who knows men at first sight; and he placed you in the company of his brother-in-law, M. d'Essart, leaving you to hope that, one day or other, you should enter the Musketeers."

"Monseigneur is correctly informed," said D'Artagnan.

"Since that time many things have happened to you. You were walking one day behind the Chartreux, when it would have been better if you had been elsewhere. Then you took with your friends a journey to the waters of Forges; they stopped on the road, but you continued yours. That is all very simple: you had business in England."

"Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan, quite confused, "I went —"

"Hunting at Windsor, or elsewhere, — that concerns nobody. I know, because it is my office to know everything. On your return you were received by an august personage, and I perceive with pleasure that you preserve the souvenir she gave you."

D'Artagnan placed his hand upon the queen's diamond, which he wore, and quickly turned the stone inwards; but it was too late.

"The day after that, you received a visit from Cavois," resumed the cardinal. "He went to desire you to come to the palace. You have not returned that visit, and you were wrong."

"Monseigneur, I feared I had incurred disgrace with your Eminence."

"How could that be, Monsieur? Could you incur my displeasure by having followed the orders of your superiors with more intelligence and courage than another would have done? It is the people who do not obey that I punish, and not those who, like you, obey — but too well. As a proof, remember the date of the day on which I had you bidden to come to me, and seek in your memory for what happened to you that very night."

That was the very evening when the abduction of Madame Bonacieux took place. D'Artagnan trembled; and he likewise recollected that during the past half-hour the poor woman had passed close to him, without doubt carried away by the same power that had caused her disappearance.

"In short," continued the cardinal, "as I have heard nothing of you for some time past, I wished to know what you were doing. Besides, you owe me some thanks. You must yourself have remarked how much you have been considered in all the circumstances."

D'Artagnan bowed with respect.

"That," continued the cardinal, "arose not only from a feeling of natural equity, but likewise from a plan I have marked out with respect to you."

D'Artagnan became more and more astonished.

"I wished to explain this plan to you on the day you received my first invitation; but you did not come. Fortunately, nothing is lost by this delay, and you are now about to hear it. Sit down there, before me, M. d'Artagnan; you are gentleman enough not to listen standing." And the cardinal pointed with his finger to a chair for the young man, who was so astonished at what was

passing that he awaited a second sign from his interlocutor before he obeyed.

"You are brave, M. d'Artagnan," continued his Eminence ; "you are prudent, which is still better. I like men of head and heart. Don't be afraid," said he, smiling. "By men of heart I mean men of courage. But young as you are, and scarcely entering into the world, you have powerful enemies ; if you do not take great heed, they will destroy you."

"Alas, Monseigneur !" replied the young man, "very easily, no doubt, for they are strong and well supported, while I am alone."

"Yes, that's true ; but alone as you are, you have done much already, and will do still more, I don't doubt. Yet you have need, I believe, to be guided in the adventurous career you have undertaken ; for, if I mistake not, you came to Paris with the ambitious idea of making your fortune."

"I am at the age of extravagant hopes, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan.

"There are no extravagant hopes but for fools, Monsieur, and you are a man of understanding. Now, what would you say to an ensign's commission in my Guards, and a company after the campaign ?"

"Ah, Monseigneur."

"You accept it, do you not ?"

"Monseigneur," replied D'Artagnan, with an embarrassed air.

"How ? You refuse ?" cried the cardinal, with astonishment.

"I am in his Majesty's Guards, Monseigneur, and I have no reason to be dissatisfied."

"But it appears to me that my Guards — mine — are also his Majesty's Guards ; and whoever serves in a French corps serves the king."



Richelieu

"Monseigneur, your Eminence has ill understood my words."

"You want a pretext, do you not? I comprehend. Well, you have this excuse : advancement, the opening campaign, the opportunity which I offer you, — so much for the world. As regards yourself, the need of protection ; for it is fit you should know, M. d'Artagnan, that I have received heavy and serious complaints against you. You do not consecrate your days and nights wholly to the king's service."

D'Artagnan colored.

"In fact," said the cardinal, placing his hand upon a bundle of papers, "I have here a whole pile which concerns you. I know you to be a man of resolution ; and your services, well directed, instead of leading you to ill, might be very advantageous to you. Come ; reflect, and decide."

"Your goodness confounds me, Monseigneur," replied D'Artagnan, "and I am conscious of a greatness of soul in your Eminence that makes me mean as an earth-worm ; but since Monseigneur permits me to speak freely —"

D'Artagnan paused.

"Yes ; speak."

"Then, I will presume to say, that all my friends are in the king's Musketeers and Guards, and that by an inconceivable fatality my enemies are in the service of your Eminence ; I should, therefore, be ill received here and ill regarded there if I accepted what Monseigneur offers me."

"Do you happen to entertain the haughty idea that I have not yet made you an offer equal to your value?" asked the cardinal, with a smile of disdain.

"Monseigneur, your Eminence is a hundred times too kind to me ; and on the contrary, I think I have not

proved myself worthy of your goodness. The siege of Rochelle is about to be resumed, Monseigneur. I shall serve under the eye of your Eminence, and if I have the good fortune to conduct myself at that siege in such a manner as merits your attention, then I shall at least leave behind me some brilliant action to justify the protection with which you honor me. Everything is best in its time, Monseigneur. Hereafter, perhaps, I shall have the right of *giving* myself; at present, I shall appear to sell myself."

"That is to say, you refuse to serve me, Monsieur," said the cardinal, with a tone of vexation, through which, however, might be seen a sort of esteem; "remain free, then, and guard your hatreds and your sympathies."

"Monseigneur —"

"Well, well," said the cardinal, "I don't wish you any ill; but you must be aware that it is quite trouble enough to defend and recompense our friends. We owe nothing to our enemies; and let me give you a piece of advice: take care of yourself, M. d'Artagnan, for from the moment I withdraw my hand from behind you, I would not give an *obolus* for your life."

"I will try to do so, Monseigneur," replied the Gascon, with a noble confidence.

"Remember at a later period and at a certain moment, if any mischance should happen to you," said Richelieu, significantly, "that it was I who came to seek you, and that I did all in my power to prevent this misfortune befalling you."

"I shall entertain, whatever may happen," said D'Artagnan, placing his hand upon his breast and bowing, "an eternal gratitude towards your Eminence for that which you now do for me."

"Well, let it be, then, as you have said, M. d'Artagnan;

we shall see each other again after the campaign. I will have my eye upon you, for I shall be there," replied the cardinal, pointing with his finger to a magnificent suit of armor he was to wear, "and on our return, well — we will settle our account!"

"Ah, Monseigneur!" cried D'Artagnan, "spare me the weight of your displeasure. Remain neutral, Monseigneur, if you find that I act as becomes a gallant man."

"Young man," said Richelieu, "if I shall be able to say to you at another time what I have said to you to-day, I promise you to do so."

This last expression of Richelieu's conveyed a terrible doubt; it alarmed D'Artagnan more than a menace would have done, for it was a warning. The cardinal, then, was seeking to preserve him from some misfortune which threatened him. He opened his mouth to reply, but with a haughty gesture the cardinal dismissed him.

D'Artagnan went out, but at the door his heart almost failed him, and he felt inclined to return. Then the noble and severe countenance of Athos crossed his mind; if he made the compact with the cardinal which he required, Athos would no more give him his hand, — Athos would renounce him.

It was this fear that restrained him, so powerful is the influence of a truly great character on all that surrounds it.

D'Artagnan descended by the staircase at which he had entered, and found Athos and the four musketeers waiting his appearance, and beginning to grow uneasy. With a word D'Artagnan re-assured them; and Planchet ran to inform the other sentinels that it was useless to keep guard longer, as his master had come out safe from the Palais-Cardinal.

Returned home with Athos, Aramis and Porthos inquired eagerly the cause of this strange interview; but

D'Artagnan confined himself to telling them that M. de Richelieu had sent for him to propose to him to enter into his Guards with the rank of ensign, and that he had refused.

"And you were right," cried Aramis and Porthos, with one voice.

Athos fell into a profound reverie and answered nothing. But when they were alone he said, "You have done that which you ought to have done, D'Artagnan; but perhaps you have been wrong."

D'Artagnan sighed deeply, for this voice responded to a secret voice of his soul, which told him that great misfortunes awaited him.

The whole of the next day was spent in preparations for departure. D'Artagnan went to take leave of M. de Tréville. At that time it was believed that the separation of the Musketeers and the Guards would be but momentary, the king holding his Parliament that very day, and proposing to set out the day after. M. de Tréville contented himself with asking D'Artagnan if he could do anything for him, but D'Artagnan answered that he was supplied with all he wanted.

That night brought together all those comrades of the Guards of M. d'Essart and the company of Musketeers of M. de Tréville who had been accustomed to associate together. They were parting to meet again when it pleased God, and if it pleased God. The night, then, was somewhat riotous, as may be imagined. In such cases extreme preoccupation is only to be combated by extreme carelessness.

At the first sound of the morning trumpet the friends separated; the Musketeers hastening to the hôtel of M. de Tréville, the Guards to that of M. d'Essart. Each of the captains then led his company to the Louvre, where the king held his review.

The king was dull and appeared ill, which detracted a little from his usual lofty bearing. In fact, the evening before, a fever had seized him in the midst of the Parliament, while he was holding his Bed of Justice. He had, not the less, decided upon setting out that same evening ; and in spite of the remonstrances that had been offered to him, he persisted in having the review, hoping by setting it at defiance to conquer the disease which began to lay hold upon him.

The review over, the Guards set forward alone on their march, the Musketeers waiting for the king, which allowed Porthos time to go and take a turn in his superb equipment in the Rue aux Ours.

The procurator's wife saw him pass in his new uniform and on his fine horse. She loved Porthos too dearly to allow him to part thus ; she made him a sign to dismount and come to her. Porthos was magnificent ; his spurs jingled, his cuirass glittered, his sword knocked proudly against his ample limbs. This time the clerks evinced no inclination to laugh, such a real ear-clipper did Porthos appear.

The musketeer was introduced to M. Coquenard, whose little gray eye sparkled with anger at seeing his cousin all blazing new. Nevertheless, one thing afforded him inward consolation ; it was expected by everybody that the campaign would be a severe one. He whispered a hope to himself that this beloved relative might be killed in the field.

Porthos paid his compliments to M. Coquenard and bade him farewell. M. Coquenard wished him all sorts of prosperities. As to Madame Coquenard, she could not restrain her tears ; but no evil impressions were taken from her grief, as she was known to be very much attached to her relatives, about whom she was constantly having serious disputes with her husband.

But the real adieux were made in Madame Coquenard's chamber; they were heart-rending.

As long as the procurator's wife could follow him with her eyes, she waved her handkerchief to him, leaning so far out of the window as to lead people to believe she wished to precipitate herself. Porthos received all these attentions like a man accustomed to such demonstrations, only on turning the corner of the street he lifted his hat gracefully, and waved it to her as a sign of adieu.

On his part Aramis wrote a long letter. To whom? Nobody knew. Kitty, who was to set out that evening for Tours, was waiting in the next chamber.

Athos sipped the last bottle of his Spanish wine.

In the mean time D'Artagnan was defiling with his company. Arriving at the Faubourg St. Antoine, he turned round to look gayly at the Bastille; but as it was the Bastille alone he looked at, he did not observe Milady, who, mounted upon a light chestnut horse, designated him with her finger to two ill-looking men who came close up to the ranks to take notice of him. To a look of interrogation which they made, Milady replied by a sign that it was he. Then, certain that there could be no mistake in the execution of her orders, she started her horse and disappeared.

The two men followed the company, and on leaving the Faubourg St. Antoine mounted two horses properly equipped, which a servant without livery had waiting for them.

CHAPTER XI.

THE SIEGE OF ROCHELLE.

THE siege of Rochelle was one of the great political events of the reign of Louis XIII., and one of the great military enterprises of the cardinal. It is then interesting and even necessary that we should say a few words about it, particularly as many details of this siege are connected in too important a manner with the history we have undertaken to relate to allow us to pass it over in silence.

The political plans of the cardinal when he undertook this siege were extensive. Let us unfold them first, and then pass on to the private plans which perhaps had not less influence upon his Eminence than the others.

Of the important cities given up by Henry IV. to the Huguenots as places of safety, there only remained Rochelle. It became necessary, therefore, to destroy this last bulwark of Calvinism, — a dangerous leaven with which the ferments of civil revolt and foreign war were constantly mingling.

Spaniards, Englishmen, and Italian malecontents, adventurers of all nations, and soldiers of fortune of every sect, flocked at the first summons under the standard of the Protestants, and organized themselves like a vast association, whose branches diverged freely over all parts of Europe.

Rochelle, which had derived a new importance from the ruin of the other Calvinist cities, was then the focus of dissensions and ambition. Moreover, its port was the last

in the kingdom of France open to the English, and by closing it against England, our eternal enemy, the cardinal, completed the work of Joan of Arc and the Duc de Guise.

Thus Bassompierre, who was at once Protestant and Catholic, — Protestant by conviction and Catholic as commander of the order of the Holy Ghost; Bassompierre, who was a German by birth and a Frenchman at heart, — in short, Bassompierre, who had a distinguished command at the siege of Rochelle, said, in charging at the head of several other Protestant nobles like himself, "You will see, gentlemen, that we shall be fools enough to take Rochelle."

And Bassompierre was right. The cannonade of the Isle of Ré presaged to him the dragonnades of the Cévennes; the taking of Rochelle was the preface to the revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

We have hinted that by the side of these views of the levelling and simplifying minister, and which belong to history, the chronicler is forced to recognize the lesser motives of the amorous man and jealous rival.

Richelieu, as every one knows, had loved the queen. Was this love a simple political affair, or was it naturally one of those profound passions which Anne of Austria inspired in those who approached her? That we are not able to say; but at all events, we have seen, by the anterior developments of this history that Buckingham had the advantage over him, and in two or three circumstances, particularly that of the diamond studs, had, thanks to the devotedness of the three musketeers and the courage and conduct of D'Artagnan, cruelly mystified him.

It was, then, Richelieu's object, not only to get rid of an enemy of France, but to avenge himself on a rival;

but this vengeance must be grand and striking and worthy in every way of a man who held in his hand, as his weapon for combat, the forces of a kingdom.

Richelieu knew that in combating England he combated Buckingham ; that in triumphing over England, he triumphed over Buckingham, — in short, that in humiliating England in the eyes of Europe, he humiliated Buckingham in the eyes of the queen.

On his side Buckingham, in pretending to maintain the honor of England, was moved by interests exactly like those of the cardinal. Buckingham also was pursuing a private vengeance. Buckingham could not under any pretence be admitted into France as an ambassador ; he wished to enter it as a conqueror.

It resulted from this that the real stake in this game, which two most powerful kingdoms played for the good pleasure of two amorous men, was simply a kind look from Anne of Austria.

The first advantage had been gained by Buckingham. Arriving unexpectedly in sight of the Isle of Ré, with ninety vessels and nearly twenty thousand men, he had surprised the Comte de Toiras, who commanded for the king in the Isle, and he had, after a bloody conflict, effected his landing.

Allow us to observe, in passing, that in this fight perished the Baron de Chantal ; that the Baron de Chantal left a little orphan girl eighteen months old, and that this little girl was afterwards Madame de Sévigné.

The Comte de Toiras retired into the citadel St. Martin with his garrison, and threw a hundred men into a little fort called the fort of La Prée.

This event had hastened the resolutions of the cardinal ; and till the king and he could take the command of the siege of Rochelle, which was determined, he had sent

Monsieur to direct the first operations, and had ordered all the troops he could dispose of to march towards the theatre of war. It was of this detachment, sent as a vanguard, that our friend D'Artagnan formed a part.

The king, as we have said, was to follow as soon as his Bed of Justice had been held ; but on rising from his Bed of Justice on the 28th of June, he felt himself attacked by fever. He was, notwithstanding, anxious to set out ; but his illness becoming more serious, he was forced to stop at Villeroy.

Now, whenever the king halted, the Musketeers halted. It followed that D'Artagnan, who was as yet purely and simply in the Guards, found himself, for the time at least, separated from his good friends, — Athos, Porthos, and Aramis. This separation, which was no more than an unpleasant circumstance, would have certainly become a cause of serious uneasiness if he had been able to guess by what unknown dangers he was surrounded.

He, however, arrived without accident in the camp established before Rochelle, on the 10th of the month of September of the year 1627.

Everything was in the same state. The Duke of Buckingham and his English, masters of the Isle of Ré, continued to besiege, but without success, the citadel of St. Martin and the fort of La Prée ; and hostilities with Rochelle had commenced, two or three days before, about a fort which the Duc d'Angoulême had caused to be constructed near the city.

The Guards, under the command of M. d'Essart, took up their quarters at the Minimes ; but, as we know, D'Artagnan, possessed with ambition to enter the Musketeers, had formed but few friendships among his comrades, and he felt himself isolated, and given up to his own reflections.

His reflections were not very cheerful. From the time of his arrival in Paris, he had been mixed up with public affairs; but his own private affairs had made no great progress, either in love or fortune. As to love, the only woman he could have loved was Madame Bonacieux; and Madame Bonacieux had disappeared, without his being able to discover what had become of her. As to fortune, he had made—he, humble as he was—an enemy of the cardinal; that is to say, of a man before whom trembled the greatest men of the kingdom, beginning with the king.

That man had the power to crush him, and yet he had not done so. For a mind so perspicuous as that of D'Artagnan, this indulgence was a light by which he caught a glimpse of a better future.

Then he had made himself another enemy, less to be feared, he thought; but nevertheless, he instinctively felt, not to be despised. This enemy was Milady.

In exchange for all this, he had acquired the protection and good-will of the queen; but the favor of the queen was at the present time an additional cause of persecution, and her protection, it was known, protected badly,—as witness Chalais and Madame Bonacieux.

What he had clearly gained in all this was the diamond, worth five or six thousand livres, which he wore on his finger; and even this diamond—supposing that D'Artagnan, in his projects of ambition, wished to keep it, to make it some day a pledge for the gratitude of the queen,—had not, in the mean while, since he could not part with it, more value than the gravel he trod under his feet.

We say than the gravel he trod under his feet, for D'Artagnan made these reflections while walking solitarily along a pretty little road which led from the camp to the village

of Angoutin. Now, these reflections had led him farther than he intended, and the day was beginning to decline, when, by the last ray of the setting sun, he thought he saw the barrel of a musket glitter from behind a hedge.

D'Artagnan had a quick eye and a prompt understanding. He comprehended that the musket had not come there of itself, and that he who bore it had not concealed himself behind a hedge with any friendly intentions. He determined, therefore, to direct his course as clear from it as he could, when, on the opposite side of the road, from behind a rock, he perceived the extremity of another musket.

This was evidently an ambushade.

The young man cast a glance at the first musket, and saw, with a certain degree of inquietude, that it was levelled in his direction; but as soon as he perceived that the orifice of the barrel was motionless, he threw himself upon the ground. At the same instant the gun was fired, and he heard the whistling of a ball pass over his head.

No time was to be lost. D'Artagnan sprang up with a bound, and at the same instant the ball from the other musket tore up the gravel on the very spot on the road where he had thrown himself with his face to the ground.

D'Artagnan was not one of those foolhardy men who seek a ridiculous death in order that it may be said of them that they did not retreat a single step. Besides, courage was out of the question here; D'Artagnan had fallen into an ambush.

"If there is a third shot," said he to himself, "I am a lost man."

He immediately, therefore, took to his heels and ran towards the camp, with the swiftness of the young men of his country, so renowned for their agility; but whatever might be his speed, the first who fired, having had time

to re-load, fired a second shot, and this time so well aimed that it struck his hat, and carried it ten paces from him.

As he, however, had no other hat, he picked up this as he ran, and arrived at his quarters, very pale and quite out of breath. He sat down without saying a word to anybody, and began to reflect.

This event might have three causes :

The first and the most natural was that it might be an ambuscade of the Rochellais, who might not be sorry to kill one of his Majesty's Guards, because it would be an enemy the less, and this enemy might have a well-furnished purse in his pocket.

D'Artagnan took his hat, examined the hole made by the ball, and shook his head. The ball was not a musket-ball, — it was an arquebuse-ball. The accuracy of the aim had first given him the idea that a special weapon had been employed. This could not, then, be a military ambuscade, as the ball was not of the regular calibre.

This might be a kind remembrance of Monsieur the Cardinal. It may be observed that at the very moment when, thanks to the ray of the sun, he perceived the gun-barrel, he was thinking with astonishment on the forbearance of his Eminence with respect to him.

But D'Artagnan again shook his head. For people towards whom he had but to put forth his hand, his Eminence had rarely recourse to such means.

It might be a vengeance of Milady ; that was most probable.

He tried in vain to remember the faces or dress of the assassins ; he had escaped so rapidly that he had not had leisure to notice anything.

" Ah, my poor friends ! " murmured D'Artagnan ; " where are you ? And that you should fail me ! "

D'Artagnan passed a very bad night. Three or four times he started up, imagining that a man was approaching his bed for the purpose of stabbing him. Nevertheless, day dawned without darkness having brought any accident.

But D'Artagnan well suspected that that which was deferred was not relinquished.

D'Artagnan remained all day in his quarters, assigning as a reason to himself that the weather was bad.

At nine o'clock next morning, the drums beat to arms. The Duc d'Orléans visited the posts. The Guards were under arms, and D'Artagnan took his place in the midst of his comrades.

Monsieur passed along the front of the line ; then all the superior officers approached him to pay their compliments, M. d'Essart, captain of the Guards, as well as the others.

At the expiration of a minute or two, it appeared to D'Artagnan that M. d'Essart made him a sign to approach. He waited for a fresh gesture on the part of his superior, for fear he might be mistaken ; but this gesture being repeated, he left the ranks, and advanced to receive orders.

"Monsieur is about to ask for some men of good-will for a dangerous mission, but one which will do honor to those who shall accomplish it ; and I made you a sign in order that you might hold yourself in readiness."

"Thanks, my captain !" replied D'Artagnan, who wished for nothing better than an opportunity to distinguish himself under the eye of the lieutenant-general.

In fact the Rochellais had made a *sortie* during the night, and had retaken a bastion of which the royal army had gained possession two days before. The matter was to ascertain, by reconnoitring, how the enemy guarded this bastion.

At the end of a few minutes Monsieur raised his voice, and said, "I want for this mission three or four volunteers, led by a man who can be depended upon."

"As to the man to be depended upon, I have him under my hand, Monsieur," said M. d'Essart, pointing to D'Artagnan; "and as to the four or five volunteers, Monsieur has but to make his intentions known, and the men will not be wanting."

"Four men of good-will who will risk being killed with me!" said D'Artagnan, raising his sword.

Two of his comrades of the Guards immediately sprang forward, and two other soldiers having joined them, the number was deemed sufficient. D'Artagnan declined all others, being unwilling to take the first chance from those who had the priority.

It was not known whether, after the taking of the bastion, the Rochellais had evacuated it or left a garrison in it; the object then was to examine the place near enough to verify the reports.

D'Artagnan set out with his four companions, and followed the trench; the two guards marched abreast with him, and the two soldiers followed behind.

They arrived thus, screened by the lining of the trench, till they came within a hundred paces of the bastion. There, on turning round, D'Artagnan perceived that the two soldiers had disappeared.

He thought that, beginning to be afraid, they had stayed behind, and he continued to advance.

At the turning of the counterscarp they found themselves within about sixty paces of the bastion. They saw no one, and the bastion seemed abandoned.

The three composing our forlorn hope were deliberating whether they should proceed any farther, when all at once a circle of smoke enveloped the giant of stone, and a

dozen balls came whistling round D'Artagnan and his companions.

They knew all they wished to know ; the bastion was guarded. A longer stay in this dangerous spot would have been useless imprudence. D'Artagnan and his two companions turned their backs, and commenced a retreat which resembled a flight.

On arriving at the angle of the trench which was to serve them as a rampart, one of the guardsmen fell. A ball had passed through his breast. The other, who was safe and sound, continued his way towards the camp.

D'Artagnan was not willing to abandon his companion thus, and stooped to raise him and assist him in regaining the lines ; but at this moment two shots were fired. One ball struck the head of the already wounded guard, and the other flattened itself against a rock, after having passed within two inches of D'Artagnan.

The young man turned quickly round, for this attack could not come from the bastion, which was hidden by the angle of the trench. The idea of the two soldiers who had abandoned him occurred to his mind, and with them he remembered the assassins of two evenings before. He resolved this time to know with whom he had to deal, and fell upon the body of his comrade as if he had been dead.

He quickly saw two heads appear above an abandoned work within thirty paces of him ; they were the heads of the two soldiers. D'Artagnan had not been deceived ; these two men had only followed for the purpose of assassinating him, hoping that the young man's death would be placed to the account of the enemy.

As he might be only wounded, and might denounce their crime, they came up to him with the purpose of

making sure. Fortunately, deceived by D'Artagnan's trick, they neglected to re-load their guns.

When they were within ten paces of him, D'Artagnan, who in falling had taken care not to let go his sword, sprang up close to them.

The assassins comprehended that if they fled towards the camp without having killed their man, they should be accused by him ; therefore their first idea was to join the enemy. One of them took his gun by the barrel, and used it as he would a club. He aimed a terrible blow at D'Artagnan, who avoided it by springing to one side ; but by this movement he left a passage free to the bandit, who darted off towards the bastion. As the Rochellais who guarded the bastion were ignorant of the intentions of the man they saw coming towards them, they fired upon him, and he fell, struck by a ball which broke his shoulder.

Meantime D'Artagnan had thrown himself upon the other soldier, attacking him with his sword. The conflict was not long ; the wretch had nothing to defend himself with but his discharged arquebuse. The sword of the guardsman slipped along the barrel of the now useless weapon, and passed through the thigh of the assassin, who fell.

D'Artagnan immediately placed the point of his sword at his throat.

"Oh, do not kill me !" cried the bandit. "Pardon, pardon, my officer, and I will tell you all."

"Is your secret of enough importance for me to spare your life for it ?" asked the young man, withholding his arm.

"Yes ; if you think existence worth anything to a man of twenty, as you are, and who may hope for everything, being handsome and brave, as you are."

"Wretch," cried D'Artagnan, "speak quickly! Who employed you to assassinate me?"

"A woman whom I don't know, but who is called Milady."

"But if you don't know this woman, how do you know her name?"

"My comrade knows her, and called her so. It was with him she agreed, and not with me; he even has in his pocket a letter from that person, who attaches great importance to you, as I have heard him say."

"But how did you become concerned in this villanous affair?"

"He proposed to me to undertake it with him, and I agreed."

"And how much did she give you for this fine enterprise?"

"A hundred louis."

"Well, come!" said the young man, laughing, "she thinks I am worth something. A hundred louis? Well, that was a temptation for two wretches like you. I understand why you accepted it, and I grant you my pardon; but upon one condition."

"What is that?" said the soldier, uneasy at perceiving that all was not over.

"That you will go and fetch me the letter your comrade has in his pocket."

"But," cried the bandit, "that is only another way of killing me. How can I go and fetch that letter under the fire of the bastion?"

"You must nevertheless make up your mind to go and get it, or I swear you shall die by my hand."

"Pardon, Monsieur; pity! In the name of that young lady you love, and whom you perhaps believe dead, but who is not!" cried the bandit, throwing himself upon his

knees and leaning upon his hand, — for he began to lose his strength with his blood.

“And how do you know there is a young woman whom I love, and that I believed that woman dead?” asked D’Artagnan.

“By that letter which my comrade has in his pocket.”

“You see, then,” said D’Artagnan, “that I must have that letter. So no more delay, no more hesitation; or else whatever may be my repugnance to soiling my sword a second time with the blood of a wretch like you, I swear by my faith as an honest man —” and at these words D’Artagnan made so fierce a gesture that the wounded man sprang up.

“Stop, stop!” cried he, regaining strength by force of terror. “I will go, — I will go!”

D’Artagnan took the soldier’s arquebuse, made him go on before him, and urged him towards his companion by pricking him behind with his sword.

It was a frightful thing to see this wretch, leaving a long track of blood on the ground he passed over, pale with approaching death, try to drag himself along without being seen to the body of his accomplice, which lay twenty paces from him.

Terror was so strongly painted on his face, covered with a cold sweat, that D’Artagnan took pity on him, and casting upon him a look of contempt, “Stop,” said he, “I will show you the difference between a man of courage and such a coward as you. Stay where you are; I will go myself.”

And with a light step, an eye on the watch, observing the movements of the enemy, and taking advantage of the accidents of the ground, D’Artagnan succeeded in reaching the second soldier.

There were two means of gaining his object, — to search

him on the spot, or to carry him away, making a buckler of his body, and search him in the trench.

D'Artagnan preferred the second means, and lifted the assassin on to his shoulders at the moment the enemy fired.

A slight shock, the dull noise of three balls which penetrated the flesh, a last cry, a convulsion of agony, proved to D'Artagnan that the would-be assassin had saved his life.

D'Artagnan regained the trench, and threw the corpse beside the wounded man, who was as pale as death.

Then he began search. A leather pocket-book, a purse, in which was evidently a part of the sum which the bandit had received, with a dice-box and dice, completed the possessions of the dead man.

He left the box and dice where they fell, threw the purse to the wounded man, and eagerly opened the pocket-book.

Among some unimportant papers he found the following letter, — that which he had sought at the risk of his life : —

“Since you have lost sight of that woman, and she is now in safety in the convent, which you should never have allowed her to reach, try, at least, not to miss the man. If you do, you know that my hand stretches far, and that you shall pay very dearly for the hundred louis you have from me.”

No signature. Nevertheless it was plain the letter came from Milady. He consequently kept it as a piece of evidence, and being in safety behind the angle of the trench, he began to interrogate the wounded man. He confessed that he had undertaken with his comrade, — the same who was killed, — to carry off a young woman who was to leave Paris by the *Barrière de La Villette* ; but having stopped to drink at a cabaret, they had missed the carriage by ten minutes.

"But what were you to do with that woman?" asked D'Artagnan, with anguish.

"We were to have conveyed her to a hôtel in the Place Royale," said the wounded man.

"Yes, yes!" murmured D'Artagnan; "that's the place, — Milady's own residence!"

Then the young man tremblingly comprehended what a terrible thirst for vengeance urged this woman on to destroy him, as well as all who loved him, and how well she must be acquainted with the affairs of the court, since she had discovered all. There could be no doubt she owed this information to the cardinal.

But amid all this he perceived, with a feeling of real joy, that the queen must have discovered the prison in which poor Madame Bonacieux was expiating her devotion, and that she had freed her from that prison; and the letter he had received from the young woman, and her passage along the road of Chaillot like an apparition, were now explained.

Then also, as Athos had predicted, it became possible to find Madame Bonacieux, and a convent was not impregnable.

This idea completely restored clemency to his heart. He turned towards the wounded man, who had watched with intense anxiety all the various expressions of his countenance, and holding out his arm to him, said, "Come, I will not abandon you thus. Lean upon me, and let us return to the camp."

"Yes," said the man, who could scarcely believe in such magnanimity, "but is it not to have me hanged?"

"You have my word," said he; "for the second time I give you your life."

The wounded man sank upon his knees, to again kiss the feet of his preserver; but D'Artagnan, who had no

longer a motive for staying so near the enemy, abridged the testimonials of his gratitude.

The guardsman who had returned at the first discharge announced the death of his four companions. They were therefore much astonished and delighted in the regiment when they saw the young man come back safe and sound.

D'Artagnan explained the sword-wound of his companion by a *sortie* which he improvised. He described the death of the other soldier, and the perils they had encountered. This recital was for him the occasion of veritable triumph. The whole army talked of this expedition for a day, and Monsieur paid him his compliments upon it. Besides this, as every great action bears its recompense with it, the brave exploit of D'Artagnan resulted in the restoration of the tranquillity he had lost. In fact, D'Artagnan believed that he might be tranquil, as one of his two enemies was killed and the other devoted to his interests.

This tranquillity proved one thing, — that D'Artagnan did not yet know Milady.

CHAPTER XII.

THE ANJOU WINE.

AFTER the most disheartening news of the king's health, a report of his convalescence began to prevail in the camp; and as he was very anxious to be in person at the siege, it was said that as soon as he could mount a horse he would set forward.

Meantime, Monsieur, who knew that from one day to the other he might expect to be removed from his command by the Duc d'Angoulême, by Bassompierre, or by Schomberg, who were all eager for his post, did but little, lost his days in wavering, and did not dare to attempt any great enterprise to drive the English from the Isle of Ré, where they still besieged the citadel St. Martin and the fort of La Prée, as on their side the French were besieging Rochelle.

D'Artagnan, as we have said, had become more tranquil, as always happens after a past danger, particularly when that danger seems to have vanished. He only felt one uneasiness, and that was at not hearing any tidings from his friends.

But one morning at the commencement of the month of November everything was explained to him by this letter, dated from Villeroy:—

M. D'ARTAGNAN, — MM. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, after having had an entertainment at my house, and enjoying themselves very much, created such a disturbance that the provost

of the castle, a very rigid man, has ordered them to be confined for some days ; but I accomplish the order they have given me by forwarding to you a dozen bottles of my Anjou wine, with which they are much pleased. They are desirous that you should drink to their health in their favorite wine. I have done this, and am, Monsieur, with great respect,

Your very humble and obedient servant,

GODEAU, *Purveyor of the Musketeers.*

“That’s all well !” cried D’Artagnan. “They think of me in their pleasures, as I thought of them in my troubles. Well, I will certainly drink to their health with all my heart, but I will not drink alone.”

And D’Artagnan went among those guardsmen with whom he had formed greater intimacy than with the others, to invite them to enjoy with him this present of delicious Anjou wine which had been sent him from Villeroy.

One of the two guardsmen was engaged that evening, and another the next, so the meeting was fixed for the day after that.

D’Artagnan, on his return, sent the twelve bottles of wine to the refreshment-room of the Guards, with strict orders that great care should be taken of it ; and then, on the day appointed, as the dinner was fixed for mid-day, D’Artagnan sent Planchet at nine in the morning to assist in preparing everything for the entertainment.

Planchet, very proud of being raised to the dignity of landlord, thought he would make all ready, like an intelligent man ; and with this view called in the assistance of the lackey of one of his master’s guests, named Fourreau, and the false soldier who had tried to kill D’Artagnan, and who, belonging to no corps, had entered into the service of D’Artagnan, or rather of Planchet, after D’Artagnan had saved his life.

The hour of the banquet being come, the two guests arrived, took their places, and the dishes were arranged upon the table. Planchet waited, towel on arm ; Fourreau uncorked the bottles ; and Brisemont, which was the name of the convalescent, poured the wine, which was a little shaken by its journey, carefully into decanters. Of this wine, the first bottle being a little thick at the bottom, Brisemont poured the lees into a glass, and D'Artagnan desired him to drink it, for the poor devil had not yet recovered his strength.

The guests having eaten the soup, were about to lift the first glass of wine to their lips, when all at once the cannon sounded from Fort Louis and Fort Neuf. The guardsmen, imagining this to be caused by some unexpected attack, either of the besieged or the English, sprang to their swords. D'Artagnan, not less forward than they, did likewise, and all ran out, in order to repair to their posts.

But scarcely were they out of the room than they were made aware of the cause of this noise. Cries of "Live the king ! Live the cardinal !" resounded on every side, and the drums were beaten in all directions.

In short, the king, impatient as has been said, had come by forced marches, and had that moment arrived with all his household and a reinforcement of ten thousand troops. His Musketeers preceded and followed him. D'Artagnan, placed in line with his company, saluted with an expressive gesture his three friends, whose eyes soon discovered him, and M. de Tréville, who detected him at once.

The ceremony of reception over, the four friends were soon in one another's arms.

"*Pardieu !*" cried D'Artagnan, "you could not have arrived in better time ; the dinner cannot have had time

to get cold ! Can it, gentlemen ? ” added the young man, turning to the two guards, whom he introduced to his friends.

“ Ah, ah ! ” said Porthos, “ it appears we are feasting ! ”

“ I hope, ” said Aramis, “ there are no women at your dinner. ”

“ Is there any drinkable wine in your tavern ? ” asked Athos.

“ Well, *pardieu !* there is yours, my dear friend, ” replied D’Artagnan.

“ Our wine ! ” said Athos, astonished.

“ Yes, that you sent me. ”

“ We send you wine ? ”

“ You know very well, — the wine from the hills of Anjou. ”

“ Yes, I know what brand you are talking about. ”

“ The wine you prefer. ”

“ Doubtless, when I have neither champagne nor chambertin. ”

“ Well, in the absence of champagne and chambertin, you must content yourselves with that. ”

“ And so, connoisseurs in wine as we are, we have sent you some Anjou wine ? ” said Porthos.

“ Not exactly, it is the wine that was sent by your order. ”

“ On our account ? ” said the three musketeers.

“ Did you send this wine, Aramis ? ” said Athos.

“ No ; and you, Porthos ? ”

“ No ; and you, Athos ? ”

“ No ! ”

“ If it was not you, it was your purveyor, ” said D’Artagnan.

“ Our purveyor ! ”

“ Yes, your purveyor, Godeau, — the purveyor of the Musketeers. ”

"My faith! never mind where it comes from," said Porthos, "let us taste it, and if it is good, let us drink it."

"No," said Athos; "don't let us drink wine which comes from an unknown source."

"You are right, Athos," said D'Artagnan. "Did none of you charge your purveyor, Godeau, to send me some wine?"

"No! And yet you say he has sent you some as from us?"

"Here is his letter," said D'Artagnan, and he presented the note to his comrades.

"That is not his writing!" said Athos. "I am acquainted with it; before we left Villeroy I settled the accounts of the regiment."

"A false letter altogether," said Porthos, "we have not been disciplined."

"D'Artagnan," said Aramis, in a reproachful tone, "how could you believe that we had made a disturbance?"

D'Artagnan grew pale, and a convulsive trembling shook all his limbs.

"Thou alarmest me!" said Athos, who never used *thee* and *thou* but upon very particular occasions, "what has happened?"

"Look you, my friends!" cried D'Artagnan, "a horrible suspicion crosses my mind! Can this be another vengeance of that woman?"

It was now Athos who turned pale.

D'Artagnan rushed towards the refreshment-room, the three musketeers and the two guards following him.

The first object that met the eyes of D'Artagnan on entering the room was Brisemont, stretched upon the ground and rolling in horrible convulsions.

Planchet and Fourreau, as pale as death, were trying to give him succor ; but it was plain that all assistance was useless, — all the features of the dying man were distorted with agony.

“ Ah ! ” cried he, on perceiving D’Artagnan, “ ah ! this is frightful ! You pretend to pardon me, and you poison me ! ”

“ I ! ” cried D’Artagnan. “ I, wretch ? What do you say ? ”

“ I say that it was you who gave me the wine ; I say that it was you who desired me to drink it. I say you wished to avenge yourself on me, and I say that it is horrible ! ”

“ Do not think so, Brisemont,” said D’Artagnan ; “ do not think so. I swear to you, I protest — ”

“ Oh, but God is above ! God will punish you ! My God, grant that he may one day suffer what I suffer ! ”

“ Upon the Gospel,” said D’Artagnan, throwing himself down by the dying man, “ I swear to you that the wine was poisoned and that I was going to drink of it as you did.”

“ I do not believe you,” cried the soldier, and he expired amid horrible tortures.

“ Frightful ! frightful ! ” murmured Athos, while Porthos broke the bottles and Aramis gave orders, a little too late, that a confessor should be sent for.

“ Oh, my friends,” said D’Artagnan, “ you come once more to save my life, not only mine, but that of these gentlemen. Gentlemen,” continued he, addressing the guardsmen, “ I request you will be silent with regard to this adventure. Great personages may have had a hand in what you have seen, and if talked about, the evil would only recoil upon us.”

“ Ah, Monsieur ! ” stammered Planchet, more dead

than alive, — “ah, Monsieur, what an escape I have had !”

“How, sirrah ! you were going to drink my wine ?”

“To the health of the king, Monsieur ; I was going to drink a small glass of it if Fourreau had not told me I was called.”

“Alas !” said Fourreau, whose teeth chattered with terror, “I wanted to get him out of the way that I might drink by myself.”

“Gentlemen,” said D’Artagnan, addressing the guardsmen, “you may easily comprehend that such a feast can only be very dull after what has taken place ; so accept my excuses, and put off the party till another day, I beg of you.”

The two guardsmen courteously accepted D’Artagnan’s excuses, and perceiving that the four friends desired to be alone, retired.

When the young guardsman and the three musketeers were without witnesses, they looked at one another with an air which plainly expressed that each of them perceived the gravity of their situation.

“In the first place,” said Athos, “let us leave this chamber ; the dead are not agreeable company, particularly when they have died a violent death.”

“Planchet,” said D’Artagnan, “I commit the corpse of this poor devil to your care. Let him be interred in holy ground. He committed a crime, it is true ; but he repented of it.”

And the four friends quitted the room, leaving to Planchet and Fourreau the duty of paying mortuary honors to Brisemont.

The host gave them another chamber, and served them with fresh eggs and some water, which Athos went himself to draw at the fountain. In a few words, Porthos and Aramis were posted as to the situation.

THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

"Well," said D'Artagnan to Athos, "you see, my dear friend, that this is war to the death."

Athos shook his head.

"Yes, yes," replied he, "I perceive that plainly; but do you really believe it is she?"

"I am sure of it."

"Nevertheless, I confess I still doubt."

"But the *fleur-de-lis* on her shoulder?"

"She is some Englishwoman who has committed a crime in France, and has been branded in consequence."

"Athos, she is your wife, I tell you," repeated D'Artagnan; "only reflect how much the two descriptions resemble each other."

"Yes; but I should think the other must be dead, I hanged her so effectually."

It was D'Artagnan who now shook his head in his turn.

"But in either case, what is to be done?" said the young man.

"The fact is, one cannot remain thus, with a sword hanging eternally over his head," said Athos. "We must extricate ourselves from this position."

"But how?"

"Listen! You must try to see her, and have an explanation with her. Say to her: 'Peace or war! My word as a gentleman never to say anything of you, never to do anything against you; on your side, a solemn oath to remain neutral with respect to me. If not, I will apply to the chancellor, I will apply to the king, I will apply to the hangman, I will move the courts against you, I will denounce you as branded, I will bring you to trial; and if you are acquitted, well, by the faith of a gentleman, I will kill you at the corner of some wall, as I would a mad dog.'"

"I like the means well enough," said D'Artagnan, "but where and how to meet with her?"

"Time, dear friend, time brings round opportunity; opportunity is the martingale of man. The more we have ventured the more we gain, when we know how to wait."

"Yes; but to wait surrounded by assassins and poisoners."

"Bah!" said Athos. "God has preserved us hitherto, God will preserve us still."

"Yes, we. Besides, we are men; and everything considered, it is our lot to risk our lives; but *she*," added he, in an undertone.

"What she?" asked Athos.

"Constance."

"Madame Bonacieux! Ah, that's true!" said Athos. "My poor friend, I had forgotten you were in love."

"Well, but," said Aramis, "have you not learned by the letter you found on the wretched corpse that she is in a convent? One may be very comfortable in a convent; and as soon as the siege of Rochelle is terminated, I promise you on my part —"

"Good," cried Athos, "good! Yes, my dear Aramis, we all know that your views have a religious tendency."

"I am only temporarily a musketeer," said Aramis, humbly.

"It is some time since he heard from his mistress," said Athos, in a low voice. "But take no notice; we know all about that."

"Well," said Porthos, "it appears to me that the means are very simple."

"What?" asked D'Artagnan.

"You say she is in a convent?" replied Porthos.

"Yes."

"Very well. As soon as the siege is over, we'll carry her off from that convent."

"But we must first learn what convent she is in."

"That's true," said Porthos.

"But I think I have it," said Athos. "Don't you say, dear D'Artagnan, that it is the queen who has made choice of the convent for her?"

"I believe so, at least."

"In that case Porthos will assist us."

"And how so, if you please?"

"Why, by your marchioness, your duchess, your princess. She must have a long arm."

"Hush!" said Porthos, placing a finger on his lips. "I believe her to be a cardinalist; she must know nothing of the matter."

"Then," said Aramis, "I take upon myself to obtain intelligence of her."

"You, Aramis?" cried the three friends. "You! And how?"

"By the queen's almoner, to whom I am very intimately allied," said Aramis, coloring.

And on this assurance, the four friends, who had finished their modest repast, separated, with the promise of meeting again that evening. D'Artagnan returned to less important affairs, and the three musketeers repaired to the king's quarters, where they had to prepare their lodging.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE INN OF THE RED DOVECOT.

MEANWHILE, the king, who, with more reason than the cardinal, showed his hatred for Buckingham, although scarcely arrived was in such haste to meet the enemy that he commanded every disposition to be made to drive the English from the Isle of Ré, and afterwards to press the siege of Rochelle; but notwithstanding his earnest wish, he was delayed by the dissensions which broke out between MM. Bassompierre and Schomberg, against the Duc d'Angoulême.

MM. Bassompierre and Schomberg were marshals of France, and claimed their right of commanding the army under the orders of the king; but the cardinal, who feared that Bassompierre, a Huguenot at heart, might press but feebly the English and Rochellais, his brothers in religion, supported the Duc d'Angoulême, whom the king, at his instigation, had named lieutenant-general. The result was that to prevent MM. Bassompierre and Schomberg from deserting the army, a separate command had to be given to each. Bassompierre took up his quarters on the north of the city, between Leu and Dompierre; the Duc d'Angoulême on the east, from Dompierre to Perigny; and M. de Schomberg on the south, from Perigny to Angoutin.

The quarters of Monsieur were at Dompierre; the quarters of the king were sometimes at Estrée, sometimes at Jarrie; the cardinal's quarters were upon the downs, at

the bridge of La Pierre, in a simple house without any intrenchment. So that Monsieur watched Bassompierre; the king, the Duc d'Angoulême; and the cardinal, M. de Schomberg.

As soon as this organization was established, they set about driving the English from the Isle.

The juncture was favorable. The English, who require, above everything, good living in order to be good soldiers, only eating salt meat and bad biscuit had many invalids in their camp. Still further, the sea, very rough at this period of the year all along the sea-coast, destroyed every day some little vessel; and the shore, from the point of L'Aiguillon to the trenches, was at every tide literally covered with the wrecks of pinnaces, *roberges*, and feluccas. The result was that even if the king's troops remained quietly in their camp, it was evident that some day or other, Buckingham, who only continued in the Isle from obstinacy, would be obliged to raise the siege.

But as M. de Toiras gave information that everything was preparing in the enemy's camp for a fresh assault, the king judged that it would be best to put an end to the affair, and gave the necessary orders for a decisive action.

As it is not our intention to give a journal of the siege, but on the contrary only to describe such of the events of it as are connected with the history we are relating, we will content ourselves with saying in two words that the expedition succeeded, to the great astonishment of the king, and the great glory of the cardinal. The English, repulsed foot by foot, beaten in all encounters, and defeated in the passage of the Isle of Loie, were obliged to re-embark, leaving on the field of battle two thousand men, among whom were five colonels, three lieutenant-colonels, two hundred and fifty captains, twenty gentlemen of rank, four pieces

of cannon, and sixty flags, which were taken to Paris by Claude de Saint-Simon, and suspended with great pomp in the arches of Notre-Dame.

Te Deums were chanted in camp, and afterwards throughout France.

The cardinal was left free to carry on the siege, without having, at least at the present, anything to fear on the part of the English.

But it must be acknowledged, this repose was but momentary. An envoy of the Duke of Buckingham, named Montague, was taken, and proof was obtained of a league between the German Empire, Spain, England, and Lorraine. This league was directed against France.

Still further, in Buckingham's lodging, which he had been forced to abandon more precipitately than he expected, papers were found which confirmed this alliance, and which, as the cardinal asserts in his memoirs, strongly compromised Madame de Chevreuse, and consequently the queen.

It was upon the cardinal that all the responsibility fell, for one is not a despotic minister without responsibility. All, therefore, of the vast resources of his genius were at work night and day, engaged in listening to the least report heard in any of the great kingdoms of Europe.

The cardinal was acquainted with the activity, and more particularly the hatred, of Buckingham. If the league which threatened France triumphed, all his influence would be lost. Spanish policy and Austrian policy would have their representatives in the cabinet of the Louvre, where they had as yet but partisans; and he, Richelieu, — the French minister, the national minister, — would be ruined. The king, even while obeying him like a child, hated him as a child hates his master, and would abandon him to the personal vengeance of Monsieur and the queen. He would

then be lost, and France, perhaps, with him. All this must be prepared against.

Couriers, becoming every instant more numerous, succeeded one another, day and night, in the little house of the bridge of La Pierre, in which the cardinal had established his residence.

There were monks, who wore the frock with such an ill grace that it was easy to perceive they belonged to the church militant ; women, a little inconvenienced by their costume as pages, and whose large trousers could not entirely conceal their rounded forms ; and peasants with blackened hands but with fine limbs, savoring of the man of quality a league off.

There were also less agreeable visits, — for two or three times reports were spread that the cardinal had nearly been assassinated.

It is true that the enemies of the cardinal said that it was he himself who set these bungling assassins to work, in order to have, if wanted, the right of using reprisals ; but we must not believe everything ministers say, nor everything their enemies say.

These attempts did not prevent the cardinal, to whom his most inveterate detractors have never denied personal bravery, from making nocturnal excursions, sometimes to communicate to the Duc d'Angoulême important orders, sometimes to confer with the king, and sometimes to have an interview with a messenger whom he did not wish to see at home.

On their part the Musketeers, who had not much to do with the siege, were not under very strict orders, and led a joyous life. This was the more easy for our three companions in particular ; for being friends of M. de Tréville, they obtained from him special permission to be absent after the closing of the camp.

Now, one evening when D'Artagnan, who was in the trenches, was not able to accompany them, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, mounted on their battle-steeds, enveloped in their war-cloaks, with their hands upon their pistol-butts, were returning from a drinking-place called the Red Dovecot, which Athos had discovered two days before upon the route to Jarrie, following the road which led to the camp, and quite on their guard, as we have stated, for fear of an ambuscade, when, about a quarter of a league from the village of Boisnau, they fancied they heard the sound of horses approaching them. They immediately all three halted, closed in, and waited, occupying the middle of the road. In an instant, and as the moon broke from behind a cloud, they saw at a turning of the road two horsemen who, on perceiving them, stopped in their turn, appearing to deliberate whether they should continue their route or go back. The hesitation created some suspicion in the three friends, and Athos, advancing a few paces in front of the others, cried in a firm voice, "Who goes there?"

"Who goes there, yourselves?" replied one of the horsemen.

"That is not an answer," replied Athos. "Who goes there? Answer, or we charge."

"Beware of what you are about, gentlemen!" said a clear voice which seemed accustomed to command.

"It is some superior officer making his night-rounds," said Athos. "What do you wish, gentlemen?"

"Who are you?" said the same voice, in the same commanding tone. "Answer in your turn, or you may repent of your disobedience."

"King's musketeers," said Athos, more and more convinced that he who interrogated them had the right to do so.

“What company?”

“Company of Tréville.”

“Advance, and give an account of what you are doing here at this hour.”

The three companions advanced rather humbly, — for all were now convinced that they had to do with some one more powerful than themselves, — leaving Athos the post of speaker.

One of the two riders, he who had spoken second, was ten paces in front of his companion. Athos made a sign to Porthos and Aramis also to remain in the rear, and advanced alone.

“Your pardon, my officer,” said Athos; “but we were ignorant with whom we had to do, and you may see that we were keeping good guard.”

“Your name?” said the officer, who covered a part of his face with his cloak.

“But yourself, Monsieur,” said Athos, who began to be annoyed by this inquisition, “give me, I beg you, the proof that you have the right to question me.”

“Your name?” repeated the cavalier a second time, letting his cloak fall, and leaving his face uncovered.

“Monsieur the Cardinal!” cried the stupefied musketeer.

“Your name?” cried his Eminence, for the third time.

“Athos,” said the musketeer.

The cardinal made a sign to his attendant, who drew near. “These three musketeers shall follow us,” said he, in an undertone. “I am not willing it should be known I have left the camp; and if they follow us we shall be certain they will tell nobody.”

“We are gentlemen, Monseigneur,” said Athos; “require our parole, and give yourself no uneasiness. Thank God, we can keep a secret.”

The cardinal fixed his piercing eyes on this courageous speaker.

"You have a quick ear, M. Athos," said the cardinal. "but now listen to this. It is not from mistrust that I request you to follow me, but for my security. Your companions are no doubt MM. Porthos and Aramis."

"Yes, your Eminence," said Athos, while the two musketeers who had remained behind advanced hat in hand.

"I know you, gentlemen," said the cardinal, "I know you. I know you are not quite my friends, and I am sorry you are not so ; but I know you are brave and loyal gentlemen, and that confidence may be placed in you. M. Athos, do me then the honor to accompany me, you and your two friends, and then I shall have an escort to excite envy in his Majesty, if we should meet him."

The three musketeers bowed to the necks of their horses.

"Well, upon my honor," said Athos, "your Eminence is right in taking us with you ; we have seen several ill-looking faces on the road, and we have even had a quarrel at the Red Dovecot with four of those faces."

"A quarrel, and what for, gentlemen?" said the cardinal ; "you know I don't like quarrellers."

"And that is the reason why I have the honor to inform your Eminence of what has happened ; for you might learn it from others, and upon a false account believe us to be in fault."

"What have been the results of your quarrel?" said the cardinal, knitting his brow.

"My friend Aramis, here, has received a slight sword-wound in the arm, but not enough to prevent him, as your Eminence may see, from mounting to the assault to-morrow if your Eminence orders an escalade."

"But you are not the men to allow sword-wounds to be inflicted upon you thus," said the cardinal. "Come, be frank, gentlemen, you have settled accounts with somebody! Confess; you know I have the right of giving absolution."

"I, Monseigneur?" said Athos. "I did not even draw my sword, but I took him who offended me round the body, and threw him out of the window. It appears that in falling," continued Athos, with some hesitation, "he broke his thigh."

"Ah, ah!" said the cardinal; "and you, M. Porthos?"

"I, Monseigneur, knowing that duelling is prohibited,—I seized a bench, and gave one of these brigands such a blow that I believe his shoulder is broken."

"Very well," said the cardinal; "and you, M. Aramis?"

"Monseigneur, being of a very mild disposition, and being likewise, of which Monseigneur perhaps is not aware, about to enter into orders, I endeavored to appease my comrades, when one of these wretches gave me a wound with a sword, treacherously, across my left arm. Then I admit my patience failed me; I drew my sword in my turn, and as he came back to the charge, I fancied I felt that in throwing himself upon me, he let it pass through his body. I only know for a certainty that he fell; and it seemed to me that he was borne away with his two companions."

"The devil, gentlemen!" said the cardinal, "three men placed *hors de combat* in a cabaret squabble! You don't do your work by halves. And pray what was this quarrel about?"

"These fellows were drunk," said Athos, "and knowing there was a lady who had arrived at the cabaret this evening, they wanted to force her door."

"Force her door!" said the cardinal, "and for what purpose?"

"To do her violence, without doubt," said Athos. "I have had the honor of informing your Eminence that these men were drunk."

"And was this lady young and handsome?" asked the cardinal, with a certain degree of anxiety.

"We did not see her, Monseigneur," said Athos.

"You did not see her? Ah, very well," replied the cardinal, quickly. "You did well to defend the honor of a woman; and as I am going to the Red Dovecot myself, I shall know if you have told me the truth."

"Monseigneur," said Athos, haughtily, "we are gentlemen, and to save our heads we would not be guilty of a falsehood."

"Therefore I do not doubt what you say, M. Athos, I do not doubt it for a single instant; but," added he, "to change the conversation, was this lady alone?"

"The lady had a cavalier shut up with her," said Athos, "but as notwithstanding the noise, this cavalier did not show himself, it is to be presumed that he is a coward."

"Judge not rashly, says the Gospel," replied the cardinal.

Athos bowed.

"And now, gentlemen, that's well," continued the cardinal. "I know what I wish to know; follow me."

The three musketeers passed behind his Eminence, who again enveloped his face in his cloak, and put his horse in motion, keeping from eight to ten paces in advance of his four companions.

They soon arrived at the silent, solitary inn. No doubt the host knew what illustrious visitor was expected, and had consequently sent intruders out of the way.

THE THREE MUSKETEERS.

Ten paces from the door the cardinal made a sign to his esquire and the three musketeers to halt. A saddled horse was fastened to the window-shutter. The cardinal knocked three times, and in a peculiar manner.

A man, enveloped in a cloak, came out immediately, and exchanged some rapid words with the cardinal; after which he mounted his horse, and set off in the direction of Surgères, which was likewise the way to Paris.

"Advance, gentlemen," said the cardinal.

"You have told me the truth, my gentlemen," said he, addressing the musketeers, "and it will not be my fault if our encounter this evening be not advantageous to you. In the mean time, follow me."

The cardinal alighted; the three musketeers did likewise. The cardinal threw the bridle of his horse to his esquire; the three musketeers fastened their horses to the shutters.

The host stood at the door. For him, the cardinal was only an officer coming to visit a lady.

"Have you any chamber on the ground-floor where these gentlemen can wait near a good fire?" said the cardinal.

The host opened the door of a large room, in which an old stove had just been replaced by a large and excellent chimney.

"I have this," said he.

"That will do," replied the cardinal. "Enter, gentlemen, and be kind enough to wait for me; I shall not be more than half-an-hour."

And while the three musketeers entered the ground-floor room, the cardinal, without asking further information, ascended the staircase like a man who has no need of having his road pointed out to him.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE UTILITY OF STOVE-PIPES.

It was evident that without suspecting it, and actuated solely by their chivalric and adventurous character, our three friends had just rendered a service to some one the cardinal honored with his special protection.

Now, who was that some one? That was the question the three musketeers put to one another. Then, seeing that none of their replies could throw any light on the subject, Porthos called the host and asked for dice.

Porthos and Aramis placed themselves at the table and began to play. Athos walked about in a contemplative mood.

While thinking and walking, Athos passed and re-passed before the pipe of the stove, broken in halves, the other extremity passing into the chamber above; and every time he passed and re-passed he heard a murmur of words, which at length fixed his attention. Athos went close to it, and distinguished some words that appeared to merit so great an interest that he made a sign to his friends to be silent, remaining himself bent with his ear directed to the opening of the lower orifice.

"Listen, Milady," said the cardinal, "the affair is important. Sit down, and let us talk it over."

"Milady!" murmured Athos.

"I listen to your Eminence with the greatest attention," replied a female voice which made the musketeer start.

"A small vessel with an English crew, whose captain is

on my side, awaits you at the mouth of the Charente, at Fort of the Point. He will set sail to-morrow morning."

"I must go thither to-night?"

"Instantly! That is to say, when you have received my instructions. Two men, whom you will find at the door on going out, will serve you as escort. You will allow me to leave first; then, after half-an-hour, you can go away in your turn."

"Yes, Monseigneur. Now let us return to the mission with which you wish to charge me; and as I desire to continue to merit the confidence of your Eminence, deign to unfold it to me in terms clear and precise, that I may not commit an error."

There was an instant of profound silence between the two interlocutors. It was evident the cardinal was weighing beforehand the terms in which he was about to speak, and that Milady was collecting all her intellectual faculties to comprehend the things he was about to say, and to engrave them in her memory when they should be spoken.

Athos took advantage of this moment to tell his two companions to fasten the door inside, and to make them a sign to come and listen with him.

The two musketeers, who loved their ease, brought a chair for each of themselves and one for Athos. All three then sat down with their heads together and their ears on the watch.

"You will go to London," continued the cardinal. "Arrived in London, you will seek Buckingham."

"I must beg your Eminence to observe," said Milady, "that since the affair of the diamond studs, about which the duke always suspected me, his Grace distrusts me."

"Well, this time," said the cardinal, "it is not necessary to steal his confidence, but to present yourself frankly and loyally as a negotiator."

"Frankly and loyally," repeated Milady, with an unspeakable expression of duplicity.

"Yes, frankly and loyally," replied the cardinal, in the same tone. "All this negotiation must be carried on openly."

"I will follow your Eminence's instructions to the letter. I only wait till you give them."

"You will go to Buckingham in my behalf, and you will tell him I am acquainted with all the preparations he has made; but that they give me no uneasiness, since at the first step he takes I will ruin the queen."

"Will he believe that your Eminence is in a position to accomplish the threat thus made?"

"Yes; for I have the proofs."

"I must be able to present these proofs for his appreciation."

"Without doubt. And you will tell him I will publish the report of Bois-Robert and the Marquis de Beautru, upon the interview which the duke had at the residence of Madame the Constable with the queen, on the evening Madame the Constable gave a masquerade. You will tell him, in order that he may not doubt, that he came there in the costume of the Great Mogul, which the Chevalier de Guise was to have worn, and that he purchased this exchange for the sum of three thousand pistoles."

"Well, Monseigneur?"

"All the details of his coming into and going out of the palace — on the night when he introduced himself in the character of an Italian fortune-teller — you will tell him, that he may not doubt the correctness of my information; that he had under his cloak a large white robe dotted with black tears, death's heads, and cross-bones, — for in case of a surprise, he was to pass for the phantom of the White Lady who, as all the world knows,

appears at the Louvre every time any great event is impending."

"Is that all, Monseigneur?"

"Tell him also that I am acquainted with all the details of the adventure at Amiens; that I will have a little romance made of it, wittily turned, with a plan of the garden, and portraits of the principal actors in that nocturnal romance."

"I will tell him that."

"Tell him further, that I hold Montague in my power; that Montague is in the Bastille; that no letters were found upon him, it is true, but that torture may make him tell much of what he knows, and even what he does not know."

"Exactly."

"Then add that his Grace has, in the precipitation with which he quitted the Isle of Ré, forgotten and left behind him in his lodging a certain letter from Madame de Chevreuse which singularly compromises the queen, inasmuch as it proves not only that her Majesty can love the enemies of the king, but that she can conspire with the enemies of France. You recollect perfectly all I have told you, do you not?"

"Your Eminence will judge: the ball of Madame the Constable; the night at the Louvre; the evening at Amiens; the arrest of Montague; the letter of Madame de Chevreuse."

"That's it," said the cardinal,—"that's it. You have an excellent memory, Milady."

"But," resumed she to whom the cardinal addressed this flattering compliment, "if, in spite of all these reasons, the duke does not give way, and continues to menace France?"

"The duke is in love to madness, or rather to folly,"

replied Richelieu, with great bitterness. "Like the ancient paladins, he has only undertaken this war to obtain a look from his lady-love. If he becomes certain that this war will cost the honor, and perhaps the liberty, of the lady of his thoughts, as he says, I will answer for it he will look twice."

"And yet," said Milady, with a persistence that proved she wished to see clearly to the end of the mission with which she was about to be charged, — "and yet, if he persists?"

"If he persists?" said the cardinal. "That is not probable."

"It is possible," said Milady.

"If he persists —" His Eminence made a pause, and resumed: "If he persists — well, then I shall hope for one of those events which change the destinies of States."

"If your Eminence would quote to me some one of these events in history," said Milady, "perhaps I should partake of your confidence as to the future."

"Well, here, for example," said Richelieu: "when, in 1610, for a cause similar to that which moves the duke, King Henry IV., of glorious memory, was about, at the same time, to invade Flanders and Italy, in order to attack Austria on both sides. Well, did there not happen an event which saved Austria? Why should not the King of France have the same chance as the emperor?"

"Your Eminence means, I presume, the knife-stab in the Rue de la Féronnerie?"

"Precisely," said the cardinal.

"Does not your Eminence fear that the punishment inflicted upon Ravillac may deter any one who might entertain the idea of imitating him?"

"There will be, in all times and in all countries, particularly if religious divisions exist in those countries,

fanatics who ask nothing better than to become martyrs. Ay, and observe, — it just occurs to me that the Puritans are furious against Buckingham, and their preachers designate him as the Antichrist.”

“Well?” said Milady.

“Well,” continued the cardinal, in an indifferent tone, “the only thing to be sought for at this moment is some woman, handsome, young, and clever, who has cause of quarrel with the duke. The duke has had many affairs of gallantry; and if he has fostered his amours by promises of eternal constancy, he must likewise have sown the seeds of hatred by his eternal infidelities.”

“No doubt,” said Milady, coolly, “such a woman may be found.”

“Well, such a woman, who would place the knife of Jacques Clément or of Ravallac in the hands of a fanatic, would save France.”

“Yes; but she would then be the accomplice of an assassination.”

“Were the accomplices of Ravallac or of Jacques Clément ever known?”

“No; for perhaps they were too high placed for any one to dare look for them where they were. The Palace of Justice would not be burned down for everybody, Monseigneur.”

“You think, then, that the fire at the Palace of Justice was not caused by chance?” asked Richelieu, in the tone with which he would have put a question of no importance.

“I, Monseigneur?” replied Milady. “I think nothing; I quote a fact, that is all. Only I say that if I were named Madame de Montpensier, or the Queen Marie de Médicis, I should use less precautions than I take, being simply called Milady Clarik.”

“That is just,” said Richelieu. “What do you require, then?”

“I require an order which would ratify beforehand all that I should think proper to do for the greatest good of France.”

“But in the first place, this woman I have described must be found, who is desirous of avenging herself upon the duke.”

“She is found,” said Milady.

“Then the miserable fanatic must be found who will serve as an instrument of God’s justice.”

“He will be found.”

“Well,” said the cardinal, “then it will be time to claim the order which you just now required.”

“Your Eminence is right,” replied Milady; “and I have been wrong in seeing in the mission with which you honor me anything but that which it really is, — that is to say, to announce to his Grace, on the part of your Eminence, that you are acquainted with the different disguises by means of which he succeeded in approaching the queen during the fête given by Madame the Constable; that you have proofs of the interview granted at the Louvre by the queen to a certain Italian astrologer who was no other than the Duke of Buckingham; that you have ordered a little romance of a satirical nature to be written upon the adventures of Amiens, with a plan of the gardens in which those adventures took place, and portraits of the actors who figured in them; that Montague is in the Bastille, and that the torture may make him say things he remembers, and even things he has forgotten; that you possess a certain letter from Madame de Chevreuse, found in his Grace’s lodging, which singularly compromises not only her who wrote it, but her in whose name it was written. Then, if he persists, notwithstand-

ing all this, — as that is, as I have said, the limit of my mission, — I shall have nothing to do but to pray God to work a miracle for the salvation of France. That is it, is it not, Monseigneur, and I shall have nothing else to do ? ”

“ That is it,” replied the cardinal, dryly.

“ And now,” said Milady, without appearing to remark the change of the duke’s tone towards her, — “ now that I have received the instructions of your Eminence as concerns your enemies, Monseigneur will permit me to say a few words to him of mine ? ”

“ Have you enemies, then ? ” asked Richelieu.

“ Yes, Monseigneur, enemies against whom you owe me all your support, for I made them by serving your Eminence.”

“ Who are they ? ” replied the duke.

“ In the first place, there is a little *intrigante*, named Bonacieux.”

“ She is in the prison of Mantes.”

“ That is to say, she was there,” replied Milady ; “ but the queen has obtained an order from the king, by means of which she has been conveyed to a convent.”

“ To a convent ? ” said the duke.

“ Yes, to a convent.”

“ And to which ? ”

“ I don’t know ; the secret has been well kept.”

“ But *I* will know ! ”

“ And your Eminence will tell me in what convent that woman is ? ”

“ I can see nothing inconvenient in that,” said the cardinal.

“ Well, now I have an enemy much more to be dreaded by me than this little Madame Bonacieux.”

“ Who is that ? ”

"Her lover."

"What is his name?"

"Oh, your Eminence knows him well," cried Milady, carried away by her anger. "He is the evil genius of both of us. It is he who in an encounter with your Eminence's Guards decided the victory in favor of the king's Musketeers; it is he who gave three desperate wounds to De Wardes, your emissary, and who caused the affair of the diamond studs to fail; it is he who, knowing it was I who had Madame Bonacieux carried off, has sworn my death."

"Ah, ah!" said the cardinal, "I know of whom you speak."

"I mean that miserable D'Artagnan."

"He is a bold fellow," said the cardinal.

"And it is exactly because he is a bold fellow that he is the more to be feared."

"I must have," said the duke, "a proof of his connection with Buckingham."

"A proof?" cried Milady; "I will have ten."

"Well, then, it becomes the simplest thing in the world; get me that proof, and I will send him to the Bastille."

"So far good, Monseigneur; but afterwards?"

"When once in the Bastille, there is no afterwards!" said the cardinal, in a low voice. "Ah, *pardieu!*" continued he, "if it were as easy for me to get rid of my enemy as it is easy to get rid of yours, and if it were against such people you required impunity—"

"Monseigneur," replied Milady, "a fair exchange. Life for life, man for man; give me one, I will give you the other."

"I don't know what you mean, nor do I even desire to know what you mean," replied the cardinal; "but I wish

to please you, and see nothing out of the way in giving you what you demand with respect to so infamous a creature, — the more so as you tell me this paltry D'Artagnan is a libertine, a duellist, and a traitor."

"An infamous scoundrel, Monseigneur, a scoundrel!"

"Give me paper, a quill, and some ink, then," said the cardinal.

"Here they are, Monseigneur."

There was a moment of silence, which proved that the cardinal was employed in seeking the terms in which he should write the note, or else in writing it. Athos, who had not lost a word of the conversation, took his two companions by the hand, and led them to the other end of the room.

"Well," said Porthos, "what do you want, and why do you not let us listen to the end of the conversation?"

"Hush!" said Athos, speaking in a low voice. "We have heard all it was necessary we should hear; besides, I don't prevent you from listening, but I must be gone."

"You must be gone!" said Porthos; "and if the cardinal asks for you, what answer can we make?"

"You will not wait till he asks; you will speak first, and tell him that I am gone on the look-out, because certain expressions of our host have given me reason to think the road is not safe. I will say two words about it to the cardinal's esquire likewise. The rest concerns myself; don't be uneasy about that."

"Be prudent, Athos," said Aramis.

"Be easy on that head," replied Athos; "you know I am cool enough."

Porthos and Aramis resumed their places by the stove-pipe.

As to Athos, he went out without any mystery, took his horse, which was tied with those of his friends to the

fastenings of the shutters, in four words convinced the attendant of the necessity of a vanguard for their return, carefully examined the priming of his pistols, drew his sword, and took, like a forlorn hope, the road to the camp.

CHAPTER XV.

A CONJUGAL SCENE.

As Athos had foreseen, it was not long before the cardinal came down. He opened the door of the room in which the musketeers were, and found Porthos playing an earnest game at dice with Aramis. He cast a rapid glance round the room, and perceived that one of his men was missing.

"What is become of M. Athos?" asked he.

"Monseigneur," replied Porthos, "he is gone as a scout, on account of some words of our host, which made him believe the road was not safe."

"And you, what have you done, M. Porthos?"

"I have won five pistoles of Aramis."

"Well; now will you return with me?"

"We are at your Eminence's orders."

"To horse, then, gentlemen; for it is getting late."

The attendant was at the door, holding the cardinal's horse by the bridle. At a short distance a group of two men and three horses appeared in the shade. These were the two men who were to conduct Milady to the fort of the Point, and superintend her embarkation.

The attendant confirmed to the cardinal what the two musketeers had already said with respect to Athos. The cardinal made an approving gesture, and retraced his route with the same precautions he had used in coming.

Let us leave him to follow the road to the camp pro-

ted by his esquire and the two musketeers, and return to Athos.

For a hundred paces he maintained the speed at which he started ; but when out of sight he turned his horse to the right, made a circuit, and came back within twenty paces of a high hedge to watch the passage of the little troop. Having recognized the laced hats of his companions and the golden fringe of the cardinal's cloak, he waited till the horsemen had turned the angle of the road, and having lost sight of them, he returned at a gallop to the inn, which was opened to him without hesitation.

The host recognized him.

"My officer," said Athos, "has forgotten to give a piece of very important information to the lady, and has sent me back to repair his forgetfulness."

"Go up," said the host ; "she is still in her chamber."

Athos availed himself of the permission, ascended the stairs with his lightest step, gained the landing, and through the open door perceived Milady putting on her hat.

He entered the chamber and closed the door behind him. At the noise he made in pushing the bolt, Milady turned round.

Athos was standing before the door, enveloped in his cloak, with his hat pulled down over his eyes. On seeing this figure, mute and immovable as a statue, Milady was frightened.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" cried she.

"Humph," murmured Athos, "it is certainly she!"

And letting fall his cloak and raising his hat, he advanced towards Milady.

"Do you know me, Madame?" said he.

Milady made one step forward, and then drew back as if she had seen a serpent.

"So far, well," said Athos. "I perceive you know me."

"The Comte de la Fère!" murmured Milady, becoming exceedingly pale, and drawing back till the wall prevented her from going any farther.

"Yes, Milady," replied Athos; "the Comte de la Fère in person, who comes expressly from the other world to have the pleasure of paying you a visit. Sit down, Madame, and let us talk, as the cardinal said."

Milady, under the influence of inexpressible terror, sat down without uttering a word.

"You certainly are a demon sent upon the earth!" said Athos. "Your power is great, I know; but you also know that with the help of God men have often conquered the most terrible demons. You have once before thrown yourself in my path. I thought I had crushed you, Madame; but either I was deceived, or hell has resuscitated you!"

Milady at these words, which recalled frightful remembrances, hung down her head with a suppressed groan.

"Yes, hell has resuscitated you," continued Athos. "Hell has made you rich, hell has given you another name, hell has almost made you another face; but it has neither effaced the stains from your soul nor the brand from your body."

Milady arose as if moved by a powerful spring, and her eyes flashed lightning. Athos remained sitting.

"You believed me to be dead, did you not, as I believed you to be? And the name of Athos as well concealed the Comte de la Fère, as the name of Milady Clarik concealed Anne de Breuil. Was it not so you were called when your honored brother married us? Our position is truly a strange one," continued Athos, laughing. "We have only lived up to the present time because we believed each other dead, and because a remembrance is less op-

pressive than a living creature, though a remembrance is sometimes devouring."

"But," said Milady, in a hollow, faint voice, "what brings you back to me, and what do you want with me?"

"I wish to tell you that though remaining invisible to your eyes, I have not lost sight of you."

"You know what I have done?"

"I can relate to you, day by day, your actions from your entrance into the service of the cardinal to this evening."

A smile of incredulity passed over the pale lips of Milady.

"Listen! It was you who cut off the two diamond studs from the shoulder of the Duke of Buckingham; it was you who had Madame Bonacieux carried off; it was you who, in love with De Wardes and thinking to pass the night with him, opened the door to M. d'Artagnan; it was you who, believing that De Wardes had deceived you, wished to have him killed by his rival; it was you who, when this rival had discovered your infamous secret, wished to have him killed in his turn by two assassins, whom you sent in pursuit of him; it was you who, finding the balls had missed their mark, sent poisoned wine with a forged letter, to make your victim believe that that wine came from his friends. In short, it was you who have but now in this chamber, seated in this chair I now fill, made an engagement with Cardinal Richelieu to cause the Duke of Buckingham to be assassinated, in exchange for the promise he has made you to allow you to assassinate D'Artagnan."

Milady was livid.

"You must be Satan!" cried she.

"Perhaps," said Athos; "but at all events listen well to this. Assassinate the Duke of Buckingham, or cause

him to be assassinated, — I care very little about that! I don't know him. Besides, he is an Englishman. But do not touch with the tip of your finger a single hair of D'Artagnan, who is a faithful friend whom I love and defend, or I swear to you by the head of my father the crime which you shall have endeavored to commit, or shall have committed, shall be the last."

"M. d'Artagnan has cruelly insulted me," said Milady, in a hollow tone; "M. d'Artagnan shall die!"

"Indeed! Is it possible to insult you, Madame?" said Athos, laughing; "he has insulted you, and he shall die?"

"He shall die!" replied Milady; "she first, and he afterwards."

Athos was seized with a kind of vertigo. The sight of this creature, who had nothing of the woman about her, recalled awful remembrances. He thought how one day, in a less dangerous situation than the one in which he was now placed, he had already endeavored to sacrifice her to his honor. His desire for blood returned, burning his brain, and pervading his frame like a raging fever; he arose in his turn, reached his hand to his belt, drew forth a pistol, and cocked it.

Milady, pale as a corpse, endeavored to cry out; but her swollen tongue could utter no more than a hoarse sound which had nothing human in it, and resembled the rattle of a wild beast. Motionless against the dark tapestry, with her hair in disorder, she appeared like a horrid image of terror.

Athos slowly raised his pistol, stretched out his arm so that the weapon almost touched Milady's forehead, and then, in a voice the more terrible from having the supreme calmness of a fixed resolution, "Madame," said he, "you will this instant deliver to me the paper the cardinal signed; or upon my soul, I will blow your brains out."

With another man, Milady might have preserved some doubt ; but she knew Athos. Nevertheless, she remained motionless.

“ You have one second to decide,” said he.

Milady saw by the contraction of his countenance that the trigger was about to be pulled ; she reached her hand quickly to her bosom, drew out a paper, and held it towards Athos.

“ Take it,” said she, “ and be accursed ! ”

Athos took the paper, returned the pistol to his belt, approached the lamp to be assured that it was the paper, unfolded it, and read : —

Dec. 3, 1627.

It is by my order and for the good of the State that the bearer of this has done what he has done.

RICHELIEU.

“ And now,” said Athos, resuming his cloak, and putting on his hat, — “ now that I have drawn your teeth, viper, bite if you can.”

And he left the chamber without once looking behind him.

At the door he found the two men, and the spare horse which they held.

“ Gentlemen,” said he, “ Monseigneur’s order is, you know, to conduct that woman, without losing time, to the fort of the Point, and never to leave her till she is on board.”

As these words agreed wholly with the order they had received, they bowed their heads in sign of assent.

With regard to Athos, he leaped lightly into the saddle, and set out at full gallop ; only instead of following the road, he went across the fields, urging his horse to the utmost, and stopping occasionally to listen.

In one of those halts he heard the steps of several horses on the road. He had no doubt it was the cardinal and his escort. He immediately made a new point in advance, rubbed his horse down with some heath and leaves of trees, and placed himself across the road, about two hundred paces from the camp.

"Who goes there?" cried he, as soon as he perceived the horsemen.

"That is our brave musketeer, I think," said the cardinal.

"Yes, Monseigneur," said Porthos, "it is he."

"M. Athos," said Richelieu, "receive my thanks for the good guard you have kept. Gentlemen, we are arrived; take the gate on the left. The watchword is, King and Ré."

Saying these words, the cardinal saluted the three friends with an inclination of his head, and took the right hand, followed by his attendant, — for that night he himself slept in the camp.

"Well!" said Porthos and Aramis, together, as soon as the cardinal was out of hearing, — "well, he signed the paper she required!"

"I know it," said Athos, coolly, "since here it is."

And the three friends did not exchange another word till they reached their quarters, except to give the watchword to the sentinels. Only they sent Mousqueton to tell Planchet that his master was requested, the instant that he left the trenches, to come to the quarters of the musketeers.

Milady, as Athos had foreseen, on finding the two men that awaited her, made no difficulty in following them. She had had for an instant an inclination to be re-conducted to the cardinal, and relate everything to him; but a revelation on her part would bring about a revelation on

the part of Athos. She might say that Athos had hung her; but then Athos would tell that she was branded. She thought it was best to preserve silence, to discreetly set off to accomplish her difficult mission with her usual skill; and then, all things being accomplished to the satisfaction of the cardinal, to come to him and claim her vengeance.

In consequence, after having travelled all night, at seven o'clock she was at the fort of the Point; at eight o'clock she had embarked; and at nine, the vessel, which with letters of marque from the cardinal was supposed to be sailing for Bayonne, raised anchor, and steered its course towards England.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE BASTION ST. GERVAIS.

ON arriving at the lodgings of his three friends D'Artagnan found them assembled in the same chamber. Athos was meditating ; Porthos was twisting his mustaches ; Aramis was saying his prayers in a charming little Book of Hours, bound in blue velvet.

"*Pardieu*, gentlemen," said he. "I hope what you have to tell me is worth the trouble, or else, I warn you, I will not pardon you for making me come here instead of getting a little rest after a night spent in taking and dismantling a bastion. Ah, why were you not there, gentlemen ? It was warm work."

"We were in a place where it was not very cold," replied Porthos, giving his mustache a twist which was peculiar to him.

"Hush !" said Athos.

"Oh, oh !" said D'Artagnan, comprehending the slight frown of the musketeer. "It appears there is something fresh abroad."

"Aramis," said Athos, "you went to breakfast the day before yesterday at the inn of the Parpaillot, I believe ?"

"Yes."

"How did you fare ?"

"For my part, I ate but little. The day before yesterday was a fish day, and they had nothing but meat."

"What," said Athos, "no fish at a seaport ?"

"They say," said Aramis, resuming his pious reading,

“that the dike which the cardinal is making drives them all out into the open sea.”

“But that is not quite what I mean to ask you, Aramis,” replied Athos. “I want to know if you were left alone, and nobody interrupted you.”

“Why, I think there were not many intruders. Yes, Athos, I know what you mean : we shall do very comfortably at the Parpaillot.”

“Let us go to the Parpaillot, then, for here the walls are like sheets of paper.”

D'Artagnan, who was accustomed to his friend's manner of acting, and who perceived immediately, by a word, a gesture, or a sign from him, that the circumstances were serious, took Athos's arm, and went out without saying anything. Porthos followed, chatting with Aramis.

On their way they met Grimaud. Athos made him a sign to come with them. Grimaud, according to custom, obeyed in silence ; the poor lad had nearly come to the pass of forgetting how to speak.

They arrived at the drinking-room of the Parpaillot. It was seven o'clock in the morning, and daylight began to appear. The three friends ordered breakfast, and went into a room in which the host said they would not be disturbed.

Unfortunately, the hour was badly chosen for a private conference. The morning drum had just been beaten ; every one shook off the drowsiness of night, and to dispel the humid morning air, came to take a drop at the inn. Dragoons, Swiss, guardsmen, musketeers, light-horsemen, succeeded one another with a rapidity which might answer the purpose of the host very well, but agreed badly with the views of the four friends. Thus they replied very curtly to the salutations, healths, and jokes of their companions.

"I see how it will be," said Athos: "we shall get into some pretty quarrel or other, and we have no need of one just now. D'Artagnan, tell us what sort of a night you have had, and we will describe ours afterwards."

"Ah, yes," said a light-horseman, with a glass of brandy in his hand, which he sipped slowly, — "ah, yes. I hear you gentlemen of the Guards have been in the trenches to-night, and that you did not get much the best of the Rochellais."

D'Artagnan looked at Athos to know if he ought to reply to this intruder who thus mixed unasked in their conversation.

"Well," said Athos, "don't you hear M. de Busigny, who does you the honor to ask you a question? Relate what has passed during the night, since these gentlemen desire to know it."

"Have you not taken a bastion?" said a Swiss, who was drinking rum out of a beer-glass.

"Yes, Monsieur," said D'Artagnan, bowing, "we have had that honor. We even have, as you may have heard, introduced a barrel of powder under one of the angles, which in blowing up made a very pretty breach. Without reckoning that as the bastion was built yesterday all the rest of the building was badly shaken."

"And what bastion is it?" asked a dragoon, with his sabre run through a goose which he was taking to be cooked.

"The bastion St. Gervais," replied D'Artagnan, "from behind which the Rochellais annoyed our workmen."

"Was the affair hot?"

"Yes, moderately so. We lost five men, and the Rochellais eight or ten."

"*Balzempleu!*" said the Swiss, who, notwithstanding the admirable collection of oaths possessed by the German language, had acquired a habit of swearing in French.



Porthos

"But it is probable," said the light-horseman, "that they will send pioneers this morning to repair the bastion."

"Yes, that's probable," said D'Artagnan.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "a wager!"

"Ah, *wooi*, a vager!" cried the Swiss.

"What is it?" said the light-horseman.

"Stop a bit," said the dragoon, placing his sabre like a spit upon the two large iron dogs which held the firebrands in the chimney, — "stop a bit, I am in it. You cursed host! a dripping-pan immediately, that I may not lose a drop of the fat of this estimable bird."

"You was right," said the Swiss; "goose-grease is kood with basdry."

"There!" said the dragoon. "Now for the wager! We listen, M. Athos."

"Yes, the wager!" said the light-horseman.

"Well, M. de Busigny, I will bet you," said Athos, "that my three companions, MM. Porthos, Aramis, and D'Artagnan, and myself, will go and breakfast in the bastion St. Gervais, and we will remain there an hour, by the watch, whatever the enemy may do to dislodge us."

Porthos and Aramis looked at each other; they began to comprehend.

"But," said D'Artagnan, in the ear of Athos, "you are going to get us all killed without mercy."

"We are much more likely to be killed," said Athos, "if we do not go."

"My faith, gentlemen," said Porthos, turning round upon his chair, and twisting his mustache, "that's a fair bet, I hope."

"I take it," said M. de Busigny; "so let us fix the stake."

"You are four, gentlemen," said Athos, "and we are four; an unlimited dinner for eight. Will that do?"

"Capitally," replied M. de Busigny.

"Perfectly," said the dragoon.

"That shoots me," said the Swiss.

The fourth auditor, who, during all this conversation had played a mute part, made a sign of the head in proof that he acquiesced in the proposition.

"The breakfast for these gentlemen is ready," said the host.

"Well, bring it," said Athos.

The host obeyed. Athos called Grimaud, pointed to a large basket which lay in a corner, and made a sign to him to wrap the viands up in the napkins.

Grimaud understood that it was to be a breakfast on the grass, took the basket, packed up the viands, added the bottles, and then took the basket on his arm.

"But where are you going to eat my breakfast?" asked the host.

"What matter, if you are paid for it?" said Athos, and he threw two pistoles majestically on the table.

"Shall I give you the change, my officer?" said the host.

"No, only add two bottles of champagne, and the difference will be for the napkins."

The host had not quite so good a bargain as he at first hoped for, but he made amends by slipping in two bottles of Anjou wine instead of two bottles of champagne.

"M. de Busigny," said Athos, "will you be so kind as to set your watch with mine, or permit me to regulate mine by yours?"

"Which you please, Monsieur!" said the light-horseman, drawing from his fob a very handsome watch, studded with diamonds; "half-past seven."

"Thirty-five minutes after seven," said Athos, "by which you perceive I am five minutes faster than you."

And bowing to all the astonished persons present, the young men took the road to the bastion St. Gervais, followed by Grimaud, who carried the basket, ignorant of where he was going, but in the passive obedience which Athos had taught him not even thinking of asking.

As long as they were within the circle of the camp, the four friends did not exchange one word; besides, they were followed by the curious, who, hearing of the wager, were anxious to know how they would come out of it. But when once they had passed the line of circumvallation, and found themselves in the open plain, D'Artagnan, who was completely ignorant of what was going forward, thought it was time to demand an explanation.

"And now, my dear Athos," said he, "do me the kindness to tell me where we are going?"

"Why, you see plainly enough we are going to the bastion."

"But what are we going to do there?"

"You know well that we go to breakfast there."

"But why did we not breakfast at the Parpaillot?"

"Because we have some very important matters to communicate to one another, and it was impossible to talk five minutes in that inn without being annoyed by all those importunate fellows, who keep coming in, saluting you, and addressing you. Here at least," said Athos, pointing to the bastion, "they will not come and disturb us."

"It appears to me," said D'Artagnan, with that prudence which allied itself in him so naturally with excessive bravery, — "it appears to me that we could have found some retired place on the downs or the sea-shore."

"Where we should have been seen all four conferring together, so that at the end of a quarter of an hour the cardinal would have been informed by his spies that we were holding a council."

"Yes," said Aramis, "Athos is right : *Animadvertuntur in desertis.*"

"A desert would not have been amiss," said Porthos ; "but it behooved us to find it."

"There is no desert where a bird cannot pass over one's head, where a fish cannot leap out of the water, where a rabbit cannot come out of its burrow, and I believe that bird, fish, and rabbit each becomes a spy of the cardinal. Better then, pursue our enterprise ; from which, besides, we cannot retreat without shame. We have made a wager, — a wager which could not have been foreseen, and of which I defy any one to divine the true cause. We are going, in order to win it, to remain an hour in the bastion. Either we shall be attacked, or not. If we are not, we shall have all the time to talk, and nobody will hear us, — for I guarantee the walls of the bastion have no ears ; if we are, we will talk of our affairs just the same. Moreover, in defending ourselves, we shall cover ourselves with glory. You see that everything is to our advantage."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan ; "but we shall indubitably attract a ball."

"Well, my dear," replied Athos, "you know well that the balls most to be dreaded are not from the enemy."

"But for such an expedition we surely ought to have brought our muskets."

"You are stupid, friend Porthos. Why should we load ourselves with a useless burden ?"

"I don't find a good musket, twelve cartridges, and a powder-flask, very useless in face of an enemy."

"Well," replied Athos, "have you not heard what D'Artagnan said ?"

"What did he say ?" demanded Porthos.

"D'Artagnan said that in the attack of last night eight or ten Frenchmen were killed, and as many Rochellais."

"What then?"

"The bodies were not plundered, were they? It appears the conquerors had something else to do."

"Well?"

"Well, we shall find their muskets, their cartridges, and their flasks; and instead of four musketoons and twelve balls, we shall have fifteen guns and a hundred charges to fire."

"Oh, Athos!" said Aramis, "truly you are a great man."

Porthos nodded in sign of agreement. D'Artagnan alone did not seem convinced.

Grimaud no doubt shared the misgivings of the young man, for seeing that they continued to advance towards the bastion, — something he had till then doubted, — he pulled his master by the skirt of his coat.

"Where are we going?" asked he, by a gesture.

Athos pointed to the bastion.

"But," said Grimaud, in the same silent dialect, "we shall leave our skins there."

Athos raised his eyes and his finger towards heaven.

Grimaud put his basket on the ground and sat down with a shake of the head.

Athos took a pistol from his belt, looked to see if it was properly primed, cocked it, and placed the muzzle close to Grimaud's ear.

Grimaud was on his legs again as if by a spring. Athos then made him a sign to take up his basket and to walk on first. Grimaud obeyed. All that Grimaud gained by this momentary pantomime was to pass from the rear-guard to the vanguard.

Arrived at the bastion, the four friends turned round.

More than three hundred soldiers of all kinds were assembled at the gate of the camp; and in a separate group

might be distinguished M. de Busigny, the dragoon, the Swiss, and the fourth better.

Athos took off his hat, placed it on the end of his sword, and waved it in the air.

All the spectators returned him his salute, accompanying this courtesy with a loud hurrah which was audible to the four ; after which all four disappeared in the bastion, whither Grimaud had preceded them.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COUNCIL OF THE MUSKETEERS.

As Athos had foreseen, the bastion was only occupied by a dozen corpses, French and Rochellais.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, who had assumed the command of the expedition, "while Grimaud spreads the table, let us begin by collecting the guns and cartridges together. We can talk while performing that necessary task. These gentlemen," added he, pointing to the bodies, "cannot hear us."

"But we could throw them into the ditch," said Porthos, "after having assured ourselves they have nothing in their pockets."

"Yes," said Athos, "that 's Grimaud's business."

"Well, then," cried D'Artagnan, "pray let Grimaud search them and throw them over the walls."

"Heaven forbid!" said Athos; "they may serve us."

"These bodies serve us?" said Porthos. "You are mad, dear friend."

"Judge not rashly, say the Gospel and the cardinal," replied Athos. "How many guns, gentlemen?"

"Twelve," replied Aramis.

"How many shots?"

"A hundred."

"That 's quite as many as we shall want. Let us load the guns."

The four musketeers went to work; and as they were

loading the last musket Grimaud announced that the breakfast was ready.

Athos replied, always by gestures, that that was well, and indicated to Grimaud, by pointing to a kind of pepper-castor, that he was to stand as sentinel. Only, to alleviate the tediousness of the duty, Athos allowed him to take a loaf, two cutlets, and a bottle of wine.

"And now, to table," said Athos.

The four friends seated themselves on the ground with their legs crossed like Turks, or even tailors.

"And now," said D'Artagnan, "as there is no longer any fear of being overheard, I hope you are going to let me into your secret."

"I hope at the same time to procure you amusement and glory, gentlemen," said Athos. "I have induced you to take a charming promenade; here is a delicious breakfast; and yonder are five hundred persons, as you may see through the loopholes, taking us for heroes or madmen, — two classes of imbeciles greatly resembling each other."

"But the secret!" said D'Artagnan.

"The secret is," said Athos, "that I saw Milady last night."

D'Artagnan was lifting a glass to his lips; but at the name of Milady, his hand trembled so, that he was obliged to put the glass on the ground again, for fear of spilling the contents.

"You saw your wi —"

"Hush!" interrupted Athos. "You forget, my dear, you forget that these gentlemen are not initiated into my family affairs like yourself. I have seen Milady."

"Where?" demanded D'Artagnan.

"Within two leagues of this place, at the inn of the Red Dovecot."

"In that case I am lost," said D'Artagnan.

"Not so bad yet," replied Athos; "for by this time she must have quitted the shores of France."

D'Artagnan breathed again.

"But after all," asked Porthos, "who is Milady?"

"A charming woman!" said Athos, sipping a glass of sparkling wine. "Villanous host!" cried he, "he has given us Anjou wine instead of champagne, and fancies we know no better! Yes," continued he, "a charming woman, who entertained kind views towards our friend D'Artagnan, who, on his part, has given her some offence for which she tried to revenge herself a month ago by having him killed by two musket-shots, a week ago by trying to poison him, and yesterday by demanding his head of the cardinal."

"What! by demanding my head of the cardinal?" cried D'Artagnan, pale with terror.

"Yes, that is as true as the Gospel," said Porthos; "I heard her with my own ears."

"I also," said Aramis.

"Then," said D'Artagnan, letting his arm fall with discouragement, "it is useless to struggle longer. I may as well blow my brains out, and all will be over."

"That's the last folly to be committed," said Athos, "seeing it is the only one for which there is no remedy."

"But I can never escape," said D'Artagnan, "with such enemies. First, my unknown man of Meung; then De Wardes, to whom I have given three sword-wounds; next Milady, whose secret I have discovered; finally, the cardinal, whose vengeance I have balked."

"Well," said Athos, "that only makes four; and we are four, — one for one. *Pardieu!* if we may believe the signs Grimaud is making, we are about to have to do with a very different number of people. What is it, Grimaud? Considering the gravity of the occasion, I

permit you to speak, my friend ; but be laconic, I beg. What do you see ? ”

“ A troop.”

“ Of how many persons ?

“ Twenty men.”

“ What sort of men ? ”

“ Sixteen pioneers, four soldiers.”

“ How far distant ? ”

“ Five hundred paces.”

“ Good ! We have just time to finish this fowl, and to drink one glass of wine to your health, D’Artagnan ! ”

“ To your health ! ” repeated Porthos and Aramis.

“ Well, then, to my health ! although I am very much afraid that your good wishes will not be of great service to me.”

“ Bah ! ” said Athos, “ God is great, as say the followers of Mahomet, and the future is in his hands.”

Then, swallowing the contents of his glass, which he put down close to him, Athos arose carelessly, took the musket next to him, and drew near to one of the loopholes.

Porthos, Aramis, and D’Artagnan followed his example. As to Grimaud, he received orders to place himself behind the four friends, in order to re-load their weapons.

At the expiration of a minute the troop appeared. They advanced along a sort of narrow channel of the trench, which made a means of communication between the bastion and the city.

“ *Pardieu !* ” said Athos, “ it was hardly worth while to distribute ourselves for twenty fellows, armed with pickaxes, mattocks, and shovels. Grimaud had only to make them a sign to go away, and I am convinced they would have left us in peace.”

“ I doubt that,” replied D’Artagnan, “ for they are

advancing very resolutely. Besides, in addition to the pioneers, there are four soldiers and a brigadier, armed with muskets."

"That 's because they don't see us," said Athos.

"My faith," said Aramis, "I must confess I feel a great repugnance to fire on these poor devils of civilians."

"He is a bad priest," said Porthos, "who has pity for heretics!"

"In truth," said Athos, "Aramis is right. I will warn them."

"What the devil are you going to do?" cried D'Artagnan, "you will be shot, my dear."

But Athos heeded not his advice. Mounting on the breach, with his musket in one hand, and his hat in the other, he said, bowing courteously, and addressing the soldiers and the pioneers, who, astonished at this apparition, stopped fifty paces from the bastion: "Gentlemen, a few friends and myself are about to breakfast in this bastion. Now, you know nothing is more disagreeable than being disturbed when one is at breakfast. We request you, then, if you really have business here, to wait till we have finished our repast, or to come again a short time hence; unless, which would be far better, you form the salutary resolution to quit the side of the rebels, and come and drink with us to the health of the King of France."

"Take care, Athos!" cried D'Artagnan; "don't you see they are aiming?"

"Yes, yes," said Athos; "but they are only civilians, — very bad marksmen, who will be sure not to hit me."

In fact, at the same instant four shots were fired, and the balls were flattened against the wall around Athos, but not one touched him.

Four shots replied to them almost instantaneously, but

much better aimed than those of the aggressors ; three soldiers fell dead, and one of the pioneers was wounded.

"Grimaud," said Athos, still on the breach, "another musket !"

Grimaud immediately obeyed. On their part, the three friends had re-loaded their arms ; a second discharge followed the first. The brigadier and two pioneers fell dead ; the rest of the troop took to flight.

"Now, gentlemen, a *sortie* !" cried Athos.

And the four friends rushed out of the fort, gained the field of battle, picked up the four muskets of the privates and the half-pike of the brigadier, and convinced that the fugitives would not stop till they reached the city, turned again towards the bastion, bearing with them the trophies of their victory.

"Re-load the muskets, Grimaud," said Athos, "and we, gentlemen, will go on with our breakfast, and resume our conversation. Where were we ?"

"I recollect you were saying," said D'Artagnan, "that after having demanded my head of the cardinal, Milady had quitted the shores of France. Whither goes she ?" added he, strongly interested in the route Milady followed.

"She goes into England," said Athos.

"With what view ?"

"With the view of assassinating, or causing to be assassinated, the Duke of Buckingham."

D'Artagnan uttered an exclamation of surprise and indignation.

"But this is infamous !" cried he.

"As to that," said Athos, "I beg you to believe that I care very little about it. Now you have done, Grimaud, take our brigadier's half-pike, tie a napkin to it, and plant it at the top of our bastion, that these rebels of Rochellais

may see that they have to deal with brave and loyal soldiers of the king."

Grimaud obeyed without replying. An instant afterwards, the white flag was floating over the heads of the four friends. A thunder of applause saluted its appearance; half the camp was at the barrier.

"How?" replied D'Artagnan, "you care little if she kills Buckingham, or causes him to be killed? But the duke is our friend."

"The duke is English; the duke fights against us. Let her do what she likes with the duke; I care no more about him than an empty bottle." And Athos threw fifteen paces from him an empty bottle from which he had poured the last drop into his glass.

"A moment," said D'Artagnan. "I will not abandon Buckingham thus. He gave us some very fine horses."

"And moreover, very handsome saddles," said Porthos, who at the moment wore on his cloak the lace of his own.

"Besides," said Aramis, "God desires the conversion and not the death of a sinner."

"Amen!" said Athos, "and we will return to that subject later, if such be your pleasure; but what for the moment engaged my attention most earnestly, and I am sure you will understand me, D'Artagnan, was the getting from this woman a kind of *carte blanche* which she had extorted from the cardinal, and by means of which she could with impunity get rid of you and perhaps of us."

"But this creature must be a demon!" said Porthos, holding out his plate to Aramis, who was cutting up a fowl.

"And this *carte blanche*," said D'Artagnan, — "this *carte blanche*, does it remain in her hands?"

"No, it passed into mine; I will not say without trouble, for if I did I should tell a lie."

"My dear Athos, I shall no longer count the number of times I am indebted to you for my life."

"Then it was to go to her that you left us?" said Aramis.

"Exactly."

"And you have that letter of the cardinal?" said D'Artagnan.

"Here it is," said Athos; and he took the invaluable paper from the pocket of his uniform. D'Artagnan unfolded it with one hand, whose trembling he did not even attempt to conceal, and read: —

Dec. 3, 1627.

It is by my order and for the good of the State that the bearer of this has done what he has done.

RICHELIEU.

"In fact," said Aramis, "it is an absolution according to rule."

"That paper must be torn to pieces," said D'Artagnan, who fancied he read in it his sentence of death.

"On the contrary," said Athos, "it must be preserved carefully. I would not give up this paper if covered with as many gold pieces."

"And what will she do now?" asked the young man.

"Why," replied Athos, carelessly, "she is probably going to write to the cardinal that a damned musketeer, named Athos, has taken her safe-conduct from her by force; she will advise him in the same letter to get rid of his two friends, Aramis and Porthos, at the same time. The cardinal will remember that these are the same men who have so often crossed his path; and then some fine morning he will arrest D'Artagnan, and for fear he should feel lonely, he will send us to keep him company in the Bastille."

"Go to ! It appears to me you make dull jokes, my dear," said Porthos.

"I do not jest," said Athos.

"Do you know," said Porthos, "that to twist that damned Milady's neck would be a smaller sin than to twist those of these poor devils of Huguenots, who have committed no other crime than singing in French the psalms we sing in Latin ?"

"What says the abbé ?" asked Athos, quietly.

"I say I am entirely of Porthos's opinion," replied Aramis.

"And I too," said D'Artagnan.

"Fortunately, she is far off," said Porthos, "for I confess she would worry me if she were here."

"She worries me in England as well as in France," said Athos.

"She worries me everywhere," said D'Artagnan.

"But when you held her in your power, why did you not drown her, strangle her, hang her ?" said Porthos.

"It is only the dead who do not return."

"You think so, Porthos ?" replied the musketeer, with a sad smile which D'Artagnan alone understood.

"I have an idea," said D'Artagnan.

"What is it ?" said the musketeers.

"To arms !" cried Grimaud.

The young men sprang up, and seized their muskets.

This time a small troop advanced, consisting of from twenty to twenty-five men ; but they were not pioneers, they were soldiers of the garrison.

"Shall we return to the camp ?" said Porthos. "I don't think the sides are equal."

"Impossible, for three reasons," replied Athos. "The first, that we have not finished breakfast ; the second, that we have still some very important things to say ; and the

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third, that it yet wants ten minutes before the lapse of the hour."

"Well, then," said Aramis, "we must form a plan of battle."

"That's very simple," replied Athos. "As soon as the enemy are within musket-shot, we must fire upon them. If they continue to advance, we must fire again. We must fire as long as we have loaded guns. If those who remain of the troop persist in coming to the assault, we will allow the besiegers to get as far as the ditch, and then we will push down upon their heads that strip of wall which keeps its perpendicular by a miracle."

"Bravo!" cried Porthos. "Decidedly, Athos, you were born to be a general, and the cardinal, who fancies himself a great soldier, is nothing beside you."

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "no divided attention, I beg; let each one pick out his man."

"I cover mine," said D'Artagnan.

"And I mine," said Porthos.

"And I *idem*," said Aramis.

"Fire, then," said Athos.

The four muskets made but one report, but four men fell.

The drum immediately beat, and the little troop advanced at a charging pace.

Then the shots were repeated without regularity, but always aimed with the same accuracy. Nevertheless, as if they had been aware of the numerical weakness of the friends, the Rochellais continued to advance in quick time.

With every three shots at least two men fell; but the march of those who remained was not slackened.

Arrived at the foot of the bastion, there was still more than a dozen of the enemy. A last discharge welcomed

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them, but did not stop them; they jumped into the ditch, and prepared to scale the breach.

"Now, my friends," said Athos, "finish them at a blow. To the wall; to the wall!"

And the four friends, seconded by Grimaud, pushed with the barrels of their muskets an enormous sheet of the wall, which bent as if pushed by the wind, and detaching itself from its base, fell with a horrible crash into the ditch. Then a fearful cry was heard; a cloud of dust mounted towards the sky, — and all was over!

"Can we have destroyed them all, from the first to the last?" said Athos.

"My faith, it appears so!" said D'Artagnan.

"No," cried Porthos; "there go three or four, limping away."

In fact, three or four of these unfortunate men, covered with dirt and blood, fled along the hollow way, and at length regained the city. These were all who were left of the little troop.

Athos looked at his watch.

"Gentlemen," said he, "we have been here an hour, and our wager is won; but we will be fair players. Besides, D'Artagnan has not told us his idea yet."

And the musketeer, with his usual coolness, re-seated himself before the remains of the breakfast.

"My idea?" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes; you said you had an idea," said Athos.

"Oh, I remember," said D'Artagnan. "Well, I will go to England a second time; I will go and find Buckingham."

"You shall not do that, D'Artagnan," said Athos, coolly.

"And why not? Have I not been there once?"

"Yes; but at that period we were not at war. At that

period Buckingham was an ally, and not an enemy. What you would now do amounts to treason."

D'Artagnan perceived the force of this reasoning, and was silent.

"But," said Porthos, "I think I have an idea, in my turn."

"Silence for M. Porthos's idea!" said Aramis.

"I will ask leave of absence of M. de Tréville, on some pretext or other which you must invent; I am not very clever at pretexts. Milady does not know me; I will get access to her without her suspecting me, and when I catch my beauty, I will strangle her."

"Well," replied Athos, "I am not far from approving the idea of M. Porthos."

"For shame!" said Aramis. "Kill a woman? No, listen to me; I have the true idea."

"Let us see your idea, Aramis," said Athos, who felt much deference for the young musketeer.

"We must inform the queen."

"Ah, my faith, yes!" said Porthos and D'Artagnan, at the same time; "we are coming nearer to it now."

"Inform the queen!" said Athos; "and how? Have we relations with the court? Could we send any one to Paris without its being known in the camp? From here to Paris it is a hundred and forty leagues; before our letter was at Angers we should be in a dungeon."

"As to remitting a letter with safety to her Majesty," said Aramis, coloring, "I will take that upon myself. I know a clever person at Tours —"

Aramis stopped on seeing Athos smile.

"Well, do you not adopt this means, Athos?" said D'Artagnan.

"I do not reject it altogether," said Athos; "but I wish to remind Aramis that he cannot quit the camp, and that

nobody but one of ourselves is trustworthy; that two hours after the messenger has set out, all the capuchins, all the police, all the black caps of the cardinal, will know your letter by heart, and you and your clever person will be arrested."

"Without reckoning," objected Porthos, "that the queen would save M. de Buckingham, but would take no heed of us."

"Gentlemen," said D'Artagnan, "what Porthos says is full of sense."

"Ah, ah! but what's going on in the city yonder?" said Athos.

"They are beating the general alarm."

The four friends listened, and the sound of the drum plainly reached them.

"You see, they are going to send a whole regiment against us," said Athos.

"You don't think of holding out against a whole regiment, do you?" said Porthos.

"Why not?" said the musketeer. "I feel myself quite in a humor for it; and I would hold out before an army if we had taken the precaution to bring a dozen more bottles of wine."

"Upon my word, the drum draws near," said D'Artagnan.

"Let it come," said Athos. "It is a quarter of an hour's journey from here to the city, consequently a quarter of an hour's journey from the city hither. That is more than time enough for us to devise a plan. If we go from this place we shall never find another so suitable. Ah, stop! I have it, gentlemen; the right idea has just occurred to me."

"Tell us."

"Allow me to give Grimaud some indispensable orders."

Athos made a sign for his lackey to approach.

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"Grimaud," said Athos, pointing to the bodies which lay under the wall of the bastion, "take those gentlemen, set them up against the wall, put their hats upon their heads, and their guns in their hands."

"Oh, the great man!" cried D'Artagnan. "I comprehend now."

"You comprehend?" said Porthos.

"And do you comprehend, Grimaud?" said Aramis.

Grimaud made a sign in the affirmative.

"That's all that is necessary," said Athos; "now for my idea."

"I should like, however, to comprehend," said Porthos.

"That is useless."

"Yes, yes! Athos's idea!" cried Aramis and D'Artagnan, at the same time.

"This Milady, this woman, this creature, this demon, has a brother-in-law, as I think you told me, D'Artagnan?"

"Yes, I know him very well; and I also believe that he has not a very warm affection for his sister-in-law."

"There is no harm in that. If he detested her it would be all the better," replied Athos.

"In that case we are as well off as we wish."

"And yet," said Porthos, "I would like to know what Grimaud is about."

"Silence, Porthos!" said Aramis.

"What is her brother-in-law's name?"

"Lord de Winter."

"Where is he now?"

"He returned to London at the first sound of war."

"Well, there's just the man we want," said Athos. "It is he whom we must warn. We will have him informed that his sister-in-law is on the point of having some one assassinated, and beg him not to lose sight of her. There is in London, I hope, some establishment

like that of the Magdalens, or of the Repentant Daughters. He must place his sister in one of these, and we shall be in peace."

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "till she comes out."

"Ah, my faith!" said Athos, "you require too much, D'Artagnan. I have given you all I have, and I beg leave to tell you that this is the bottom of my sack."

"But I think it would be still better," said Aramis, "to inform the queen and Lord de Winter at the same time."

"Yes; but who is to carry the letter to Tours, and who to London?"

"I answer for Bazin," said Aramis.

"And I for Planchet," said D'Artagnan.

"Ay," said Porthos, "if we cannot leave the camp, our lackeys may."

"To be sure they may; and this very day we will write the letters," said Aramis. "Give the lackeys money, and they will start."

"We will give them money?" replied Athos. "Have you any money?"

The four friends looked at one another, and a cloud came over the brows which but lately had been so cheerful.

"Look out!" cried D'Artagnan, "I see black points and red points moving yonder. Why did you talk of a regiment, Athos? It is a veritable army!"

"My faith, yes," said Athos; "there they are. See the sneaks come, without drum or trumpet. Ah, ah! have you finished, Grimaud?"

Grimaud made a sign in the affirmative, and pointed to a dozen bodies which he had set up in the most picturesque attitudes. Some carried arms, others seemed to be taking aim, and the remainder appeared merely to be sword in hand.

"Bravo!" said Athos; "that does honor to your imagination."

"All very well," said Porthos, "but I should like to understand."

"Let us decamp first, and you will understand afterwards."

"A moment, gentlemen, a moment; give Grimaud time to clear away the breakfast."

"Ah, ah!" said Aramis, "the black points and the red points are visibly enlarging. I am of D'Artagnan's opinion; we have no time to lose in regaining our camp."

"My faith," said Athos, "I have nothing more to say against a retreat. We betted upon one hour, and we have stayed an hour and a half. Nothing can be said; let us be off, gentlemen, let us be off!"

Grimaud was already ahead, with the basket and the dessert. The four friends followed, ten paces behind him.

"What the devil shall we do now, gentlemen?" cried Athos.

"Have you forgotten anything?" said Aramis.

"The white flag, *morbleu!* We must not leave a flag in the hands of the enemy, even if that flag be but a napkin."

And Athos ran back to the bastion, mounted the platform, and bore off the flag; but as the Rochellais had arrived within musket range, they opened a terrible fire upon this man, who appeared to expose himself for pleasure's sake.

But Athos might be said to bear a charmed life. The balls passed and whistled all round him; not one struck him.

Athos waved his flag, turning his back on the guards of the city, and saluting those of the camp. On both

sides loud cries arose, — on the one side cries of anger, on the other cries of enthusiasm.

A second discharge followed the first, and three balls, by passing through it, made the napkin really a flag. Cries were heard from the camp, "Come down! come down!"

Athos came down; his friends, who anxiously awaited him, saw him return with joy.

"Come along, Athos, come along!" cried D'Artagnan; "now we have found everything except money, it would be stupid to be killed."

But Athos continued to march majestically, whatever remarks his companions made; and they, finding their remarks useless, regulated their pace by his.

Grimaud and his basket were far in advance, out of the range of the balls.

At the end of an instant they heard a furious fusillade.

"What's that?" asked Porthos, "what are they firing at now? I hear no balls whistle, and I see nobody!"

"They are firing at the corpses," replied Athos.

"But the dead cannot return their fire."

"Certainly not! They will then fancy it is an ambuscade, they will deliberate; and by the time they have found out the pleasantry, we shall be out of the range of their balls. That renders it useless to get a pleurisy by too much haste."

"Oh, I comprehend now," said the astonished Porthos.

"That's lucky," said Athos, shrugging his shoulders.

On their part, the French, on seeing the four friends return at such a step, uttered cries of enthusiasm.

At length a fresh discharge was heard, and this time the balls came rattling among the stones around the four friends, and whistling sharply in their ears. The Rochelais had at last taken possession of the bastion.

"These Rochellais are bungling fellows," said Athos ; how many have we killed of them, — a dozen ?"

"Or fifteen."

"How many did we crush under the wall ?"

"Eight or ten."

"And in exchange for all that not even a scratch ! Ah, but what is the matter with your hand, D'Artagnan ? It bleeds, seemingly."

"Oh, it's nothing," said D'Artagnan.

"A spent ball ?"

"Not even that."

"What is it, then ?"

We have said that Athos loved D'Artagnan like a child, and this sombre and inflexible personage felt the anxiety of a parent for the young man.

"Only grazed a little," replied D'Artagnan ; "my fingers were caught between two stones, — that of the wall and that of my ring, — and the skin was broken."

"That comes of wearing diamonds, my master," said Athos, disdainfully.

"Ah, to be sure," cried Porthos, "there is a diamond. Why the devil, then, do we plague ourselves about money, when there is a diamond ?"

"Stop a bit !" said Aramis.

"Well thought of, Porthos ; this time you have an idea."

"Undoubtedly," said Porthos, drawing himself up at Athos's compliment ; "as there is a diamond, let us sell it."

"But," said D'Artagnan, "it is the queen's diamond."

"The stronger reason why it should be sold," replied Athos. "The queen saving M. de Buckingham, her lover ; nothing more just. The queen saving us, her friends ; nothing more moral. Let us sell the diamond. What

says Monsieur the Abbé? I don't ask Porthos ; his opinion has been given."

"Why, I think," said Aramis, blushing as usual, "that his ring not coming from a mistress, and consequently not being a love-token, D'Artagnan may sell it."

"My dear Aramis, you speak like theology personified. Your advice, then, is —"

"To sell the diamond," replied Aramis.

"Well, then," said D'Artagnan, gayly, "let us sell the diamond, and say no more about it."

The fusillade continued ; but the friends were out of reach, and the Rochellais only fired to appease their consciences.

"My faith, it was time that idea came into Porthos's head. Here we are at the camp ; therefore, gentlemen, not a word more of this affair. We are observed ; they are coming to meet us. We shall be carried in triumph."

In fact, as we have said, the whole camp was in motion. More than two thousand persons had assisted, as at a spectacle, in this fortunate but wild undertaking of the four friends, — an undertaking of which they were far from suspecting the real motive. Nothing was heard but cries of "Live the Musketeers ! Live the Guards !" M. de Busigny was the first to come and shake Athos by the hand, and acknowledge that the wager was lost. The dragoon and the Swiss followed him, and all their comrades followed the dragoon and the Swiss. There was nothing but felicitations, pressures of the hand, and embraces ; there was no end to the inextinguishable laughter at the Rochellais. The tumult at length became so great that the cardinal fancied there must be some riot, and sent La Houdinière, his captain of the Guards, to inquire what was going on.

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The affair was described to the messenger with all the effervescence of enthusiasm.

"Well?" asked the cardinal, on seeing La Houdinière return.

"Well, Monseigneur," replied the latter, "three musketeers and a guardsman laid a wager with M. de Busigny that they would go and breakfast in the bastion St. Gervais; and while breakfasting, they held it for two hours against the enemy, and have killed I don't know how many Rochellais."

"Did you inquire the names of those three musketeers?"

"Yes, Monseigneur."

"What are their names?"

"MM. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis."

"Still my three brave fellows!" murmured the cardinal. "And the guardsman?"

"D'Artagnan."

"Still my young scapegrace. Positively, these four men must be on my side."

That same evening the cardinal spoke to M. de Tréville of the exploit of the morning, which was the talk of the whole camp. M. de Tréville, who had received the account of the adventure from the mouths of the heroes of it, related it in all its details to his Eminence, not for getting the episode of the napkin.

"That's well, M. de Tréville," said the cardinal; "pray let that napkin be sent to me. I will have three *fleur-de-lis* embroidered on it in gold, and will give it to your company as a standard."

"Monseigneur," said M. de Tréville, "that will be unjust to the Guardsmen. M. d'Artagnan is not with me; he serves under M. d'Essart."

"Well, then, take him," said the cardinal; "when

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four men are so much attached to one another, it is only fair that they should serve in the same company."

That same evening, M. de Tréville announced this good news to the three musketeers and D'Artagnan, inviting all four to breakfast with him next morning.

D'Artagnan was beside himself with joy. We know that the dream of his life had been to become a musketeer. The three friends were likewise greatly delighted.

"My faith," said D'Artagnan to Athos, "you had a triumphant idea! As you said, we have acquired glory, and were enabled to carry on a conversation of the highest importance."

"Which we can resume now without anybody suspecting us, for, with the help of God, we shall henceforth pass for cardinalists."

That evening D'Artagnan went to present his respects to M. d'Essart, and inform him of his promotion.

M. d'Essart, who esteemed D'Artagnan, made him offers of help, as this change would entail expenses for equipment.

D'Artagnan refused; but thinking the opportunity a good one, he begged him to have the diamond he put into his hand valued, as he wished to turn it into money.

The next day, by two o'clock, M. d'Essart's valet came to D'Artagnan's lodging, and gave him a bag containing seven thousand livres.

This was the price of the queen's diamond.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A FAMILY AFFAIR.

ATHOS had invented the phrase, *family affair*. A family affair was not subject to the investigation of the cardinal ; a family affair concerned nobody. People might employ themselves in a family affair before all the world. Therefore Athos had invented the phrase, *family affair*.

Aramis had discovered the idea, *the lackeys*.

Porthos had discovered the means, *the diamond*.

D'Artagnan alone had discovered nothing, — he, ordinarily the most inventive of the four ; but it must be also said that the very name of Milady paralyzed him.

Ah ! no, we were mistaken ; he had discovered a purchaser for his diamond.

The breakfast at M. de Tréville's was as gay and cheerful as possible. D'Artagnan already wore his uniform, — for being nearly of the same size as Aramis, and as Aramis was so liberally paid by the publisher who purchased his poem as to allow him to buy everything double, he sold his friend a complete outfit.

D'Artagnan would have been at the height of his wishes if he had not constantly seen Milady like a dark cloud hovering in the horizon.

After breakfast, it was agreed that they should meet again in the evening at Athos's lodging, and there finish their plans.

D'Artagnan passed the day in exhibiting his musketeer's uniform in every street of the camp.

In the evening, at the appointed hour the four friends met. There only remained three things to decide, — what they should write to Milady's brother; what they should write to the clever person at Tours; and which should be the lackeys to carry the letters.

Every one offered his own. Athos talked of the discretion of Grimaud, who never spoke a word but when his master unlocked his mouth. Porthos boasted of the strength of Mousqueton, who was big enough to thrash four men of ordinary size. Aramis, confiding in the address of Bazin, made a pompous eulogium on his candidate. Finally, D'Artagnan had entire faith in the bravery of Planchet, and reminded them of the manner in which he had conducted himself in the ticklish affair of Boulogne.

These four virtues disputed the prize for a length of time, and gave birth to magnificent speeches which we do not repeat here, for fear they should be deemed too long.

"Unfortunately," said Athos, "he whom we send must possess in himself alone the four qualities united."

"But where is such a lackey to be found?"

"Not to be found!" cried Athos. "I know it well; so take Grimaud."

"Take Mousqueton."

"Take Bazin."

"Take Planchet. Planchet is brave and shrewd; they are two qualities out of the four."

"Gentlemen," said Aramis, "the principal question is not to know which of our four lackeys is the most discreet, the most strong, the most clever, or the most brave; the principal thing is to know which loves money the best."

"What Aramis says is very sensible," replied Athos; "we must speculate upon the faults of people, and not

upon their virtues. Monsieur Abbé, you are a great moralist."

"Doubtless," said Aramis, "for we not only require to be well served in order to succeed, but moreover, not to fail; for in case of failure, heads are in question, not for our lackeys —"

"Speak lower, Aramis," said Athos.

"That's wise, — not for the lackeys," resumed Aramis, "but for the master, — for the *masters*, we may say. Are our lackeys sufficiently devoted to us to risk their lives for us? No."

"My faith," said D'Artagnan, "I would almost answer for Planchet."

"Well, my dear friend, add to his natural devotedness a good sum of money, and then, instead of answering for him once, answer for him twice."

"Why, good God! you will be deceived just the same," said Athos, who was an optimist when things were concerned, and a pessimist when men were in question. "They will promise everything for the sake of the money, and on the road fear will prevent them from acting. Once taken, they will be pressed; when pressed, they will confess everything. What the devil! we are not children. To reach England," — Athos lowered his voice, — "all France, covered with the spies and creatures of the cardinal, must be crossed. A passport for embarkation must be obtained; and the party must be acquainted with English in order to ask the way to London. Really, I think the thing very difficult."

"Not at all," cried D'Artagnan, who was anxious the matter should be accomplished; "on the contrary, I think it very easy. It would be, no doubt, *parbleu*, if we write to Lord de Winter about affairs of vast importance, of the horrors of the cardinal —"

"Speak lower!" said Athos.

-- "of intrigues and secrets of State," continued D'Artagnan, complying with the recommendation. "There can be no doubt we would all be broken on the wheel; but for God's sake, do not forget, as you yourself said, Athos, that we only write to him concerning a family affair; that we only write to him to entreat that as soon as Milady arrives in London he will put it out of her power to injure us. I will write to him, then, nearly in these terms."

"Let us see," said Athos, assuming in advance a critical look.

"*Monsieur and dear friend* —"

"Ah, yes! *Dear friend* to an Englishman," interrupted Athos; "well commenced! Bravo, D'Artagnan! Only with that word you would be quartered, instead of being broken on the wheel."

"Well, perhaps. I will say, then, *Monsieur*, quite short."

"You may even say, *My Lord*," replied Athos, who stickled for propriety.

"*My Lord, do you remember the little goat-pasture of the Luxembourg?*"

"Good, *the Luxembourg*! One might believe this an allusion to the queen-mother! That's ingenious," said Athos.

"Well, then, we will put simply, *My Lord, do you remember a certain little enclosure where your life was spared?*"

"My dear D'Artagnan, you will never make anything but a very bad secretary. *Where your life was spared!* For shame! that's unworthy. A man of spirit is not to be reminded of such services. A benefit reproached is an offence committed."

"The devil!" said D'Artagnan, "you are insupportable. If the letter must be written under your censure, my faith, I renounce the task."

"And you will do right. Handle the musket and the sword, my dear fellow. You will come off splendidly at those two exercises ; but pass the pen over to Monsieur Abbé. That's his province."

"Ay, ay!" said Porthos ; "pass the pen to Aramis, who writes theses in Latin."

"Well, so be it," said D'Artagnan. "Draw up this note for us, Aramis ; but by our Holy Father the Pope, cut it short, for I shall prune you in my turn, I warn you."

"I ask no better," said Aramis, with that ingenuous air of confidence which every poet has in himself ; "but let me be properly acquainted with the subject. I have heard here and there that this sister-in-law was a hussy. I have obtained a proof of it by listening to her conversation with the cardinal."

"Lower ! *sacrebleu* !" said Athos.

"But," continued Aramis, "the details escape me."

"And me also," said Porthos.

D'Artagnan and Athos looked at each other for some time in silence. At length Athos, after serious reflection and becoming more pale than usual, made a sign of assent to D'Artagnan, who by it understood he was at liberty to speak.

"Well, this is what you have to say," said D'Artagnan : "*My Lord, your sister-in-law is an infamous woman, who wished to have you killed that she might inherit your wealth ; but she could not marry your brother, being already married in France, and having been —*" D'Artagnan stopped, as if seeking for the word, and looked at Athos.

"Repudiated by her husband," said Athos.

"Because she had been branded," continued D'Artagnan.

"Bah !" cried Porthos. "Impossible ! What do you

say, — that she wanted to have her brother-in-law killed ? ”

“ Yes.”

“ She was married ? ” asked Aramis.

“ Yes.”

“ And her husband found out that she had a *fleur-de-lis* on her shoulder ? ” cried Porthos.

“ Yes.”

These three *yesses* had been pronounced by Athos, each with a sadder intonation.

“ And who has seen this *fleur-de-lis* ? ” inquired Aramis.

“ D’Artagnan and I. Or rather, to observe the chronological order, I and D’Artagnan,” replied Athos.

“ And does the husband of this frightful creature still live ? ” said Aramis.

“ He still lives.”

“ Are you quite sure of it ? ”

“ I am he.”

There was a moment of cold silence, during which every one was affected according to his nature.

“ This time,” said Athos, first breaking the silence, “ D’Artagnan has given us an excellent programme, and the letter must be written at once.”

“ The devil ! You are right, Athos,” said Aramis ; “ and it is a rather difficult matter. The chancellor himself would be puzzled how to write such a letter, and yet the chancellor draws up an official report very readily. Never mind ! Be silent, I will write.”

Aramis accordingly took the quill, reflected for a few moments, wrote eight or ten lines in a charming little female hand, and then with a voice soft and slow, as if each word had been scrupulously weighed, he read the following : —

MY LORD, — The person who writes these few lines had the honor of crossing swords with you in the little enclosure of the Rue d'Enfer. As you have several times since declared yourself the friend of that person, he thinks it his duty to respond to that friendship by sending you important information. Twice you have nearly been the victim of a near relative whom you believe to be your heir, because you are ignorant that before she contracted a marriage in England she was already married in France. But the third time, which is the present, you may succumb. Your relative left Rochelle for England during the night. Watch her arrival, for she has great and terrible projects. If you require to know positively what she is capable of, read her past history on her left shoulder.

"Well, now that will do wonderfully well," said Athos. "My dear Aramis, you have the pen of a secretary of State. Lord de Winter will now be upon his guard, if the letter should reach him; and even if it should fall into the hands of the cardinal, we shall not be compromised. But as the lackey who goes may make us believe he has been to London, and may stop at Châtellerault, let us give him only half the sum promised him, with the letter, with an agreement that he shall have the other half in exchange for the reply. Have you the diamond?" continued Athos.

"I have what is still better. I have the price;" and D'Artagnan threw the bag upon the table. At the sound of the gold Aramis raised his eyes, and Porthos started. As to Athos, he remained unmoved.

"How much in that little bag?"

"Seven thousand livres, in louis of twelve francs."

"Seven thousand livres!" cried Porthos. "That poor little diamond was worth seven thousand livres?"

"It appears so," said Athos, "since here they are. I don't suppose that our friend D'Artagnan has added any of his own to the amount."

"But, gentlemen, in all this," said D'Artagnan, "we do not think of the queen. Let us take some heed of the welfare of her dear Buckingham. That is the least we owe her."

"That's true," said Athos; "but that concerns Aramis."

"Well," replied the latter, blushing, "what must I say?"

"Oh, that's simple enough!" replied Athos. "Write a second letter for that clever personage who lives at Tours."

Aramis resumed his pen, reflected a little, and wrote the following lines, which he immediately submitted to the approbation of his friends.

"*My dear cousin.*"

"Ah, ah!" said Athos. "This clever person is your relative, then?"

"Cousin-german."

"Go on, to your *cousin*, then!"

Aramis continued:—

MY DEAR COUSIN, — His Eminence, the cardinal, whom God preserve for the happiness of France and the confusion of the enemies of the kingdom, is on the point of putting an end to the heretic rebellion of Rochelle. It is probable that the succor of the English fleet will never even arrive in sight of the place. I will even venture to say that I am certain M. de Buckingham will be prevented from setting out by some great event. His Eminence is the most illustrious politician of times past, of times present, and probably of times to come. He would extinguish the sun if the sun incommoded him. Give these happy tidings to your sister, my dear cousin. I have dreamed that the unlucky Englishman was dead. I cannot recollect whether it was by steel or by poison; only of this I am sure, I have dreamed he was dead, and you know my dreams never deceive me. Be assured, then, of seeing me soon return.

"Capital," cried Athos; "You are the king of poets, my dear Aramis. You speak like the Apocalypse, and

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you are as true as the Gospel. There is nothing now to do but to put the address to this letter."

"That is easily done," said Aramis.

He folded the letter fancifully, and took up his pen and wrote : —

To Mademoiselle Michon, seamstress, Tours.

The three friends looked at one another and laughed ; they were caught.

"Now," said Aramis, "you will please to understand, gentlemen, that Bazin alone can carry this letter to Tours. My cousin knows nobody but Bazin, and places confidence in nobody but him ; any other person would fail. Besides, Bazin is ambitious and learned ; Bazin has read history, gentlemen, he knows that Sixtus the Fifth became pope after having kept pigs. Well, as he means to enter the Church at the same time as myself, he does not despair of becoming pope in his turn, or at least a cardinal. You can understand that a man who has such views will never allow himself to be taken, or if taken, will undergo martyrdom rather than speak."

"Very well," said D'Artagnan, "I consent to Bazin, with all my heart, but grant me Planchet. Milady had him one day turned out of doors, with sundry blows of a good stick to accelerate his motions. Now, Planchet has an excellent memory ; and I will be bound that sooner than relinquish any possible means of vengeance, he will allow himself to be beaten to death. If your arrangements at Tours are your arrangements, Aramis, those of London are mine. I request, then, that Planchet may be chosen, more particularly as he has already been to London with me, and knows how to speak very correctly : *London, sir, if you please, and my master, Lord d'Ar-*

tagnan. With that you may be satisfied he can make his way, both going and returning."

"In that case," said Athos, "Planchet must receive seven hundred livres for going, and seven hundred livres for coming back ; and Bazin, three hundred livres for going, and three hundred livres for returning, — that will reduce the sum to five thousand livres. We will each take a thousand livres to be employed as seems good, and we will leave a fund of a thousand livres under the guardianship of Monsieur Abbé here, for extraordinary occasions or common wants. Will that do?"

"My dear Athos," said Aramis, "you speak like Nestor, who was, as every one knows, the wisest among the Greeks."

"Well, then," said Athos, "it is agreed. Planchet and Bazin shall go. Everything considered, I am not sorry to retain Grimaud ; he is accustomed to my ways, and I am particular. Yesterday's affair must have shaken him a little ; his voyage would upset him quite."

Planchet was sent for, and instructions were given him. The matter had been named to him by D'Artagnan, who in the first place pointed out the money to him, then the glory, and then the danger.

"I will carry the letter in the lining of my coat," said Planchet ; "and if I am taken I will swallow it."

"Well, but then you will not be able to fulfil your commission," said D'Artagnan.

"You will give me a copy this evening, which I shall know by heart to-morrow."

D'Artagnan looked at his friends, as if to say, "Well, what did I tell you?"

"Now," continued he, addressing Planchet, "you have eight days to get an interview with Lord de Winter ; you have eight days to return, — in all sixteen days. If, on the

sixteenth day after your departure, at eight o'clock in the evening you are not here, no money, — even if it be but five minutes past eight."

"Then, Monsieur," said Planchet, "you must buy me a watch."

"Take this," said Athos, with his usual careless generosity, giving him his own, "and be a good lad. Remember, if you talk, if you babble, if you get drunk, you risk your master's head, who has so much confidence in your fidelity, and who answers for you. But remember, also, that if by your fault any evil happens to D'Artagnan, I will find you, wherever you may be, for the purpose of ripping up your belly."

"Oh, Monsieur!" said Planchet, humiliated by the suspicion, and moreover, terrified at the calm air of the musketeer.

"And I," said Porthos, rolling his large eyes, "remember, I will skin you alive."

"Ah, Monsieur!"

"And I," said Aramis, with his soft, melodious voice, "remember that I will roast you at a slow fire, like a savage."

"Ah, Monsieur!"

Planchet began to weep. We will not venture to say whether it was from terror, created by the threats, or from tenderness at seeing four friends so closely united.

D'Artagnan took his hand. "See, Planchet," said he, "these gentlemen only say this out of affection for me, but at bottom, they all like you."

"Ah, Monsieur," said Planchet, "I will succeed, or I will consent to be cut in quarters; and if they do cut me in quarters, be assured that not a morsel of me will speak."

It was decided that Planchet should set out the next day, at eight o'clock in the morning, in order, as he had

said, that he might during the night learn the letter by heart. He gained just twelve hours by this engagement ; he was to be back on the sixteenth day, by eight o'clock in the evening.

In the morning, as he was mounting his horse, D'Artagnan, who felt at the bottom of his heart a partiality for the duke, took Planchet aside.

"Listen," said he to him. "When you have given the letter to Lord de Winter, and he has read it, you will further say to him : *Watch over his Grace Lord Buckingham, for they wish to assassinate him.* But this, Planchet, is so serious and important that I have not informed my friends that I would intrust this secret to you ; and for a captain's commission I would not write it."

"Be satisfied, Monsieur," said Planchet, "you shall see if confidence can be placed in me."

Mounted on an excellent horse, which he was to leave at the end of twenty leagues in order to take the post, Planchet set off at a gallop, his spirits a little depressed by the triple promise made him by the musketeers, but otherwise as light-hearted as possible.

Bazin set out the next day for Tours, and was allowed eight days for performing his commission.

The four friends, during the period of these two absences, had, as may well be supposed, the eye on the watch, the nose to the wind, and the ear on the hark. Their days were passed in endeavoring to catch all that was said, in observing the proceedings of the cardinal, and in looking out for all the couriers who arrived. More than once an involuntary trembling seized them when called upon for some unexpected service. They had, besides, to look constantly to their own proper safety ; Milady was a phantom which, when it had once appeared to people, did not allow them to sleep very quietly.

On the morning of the eighth day, Bazin, fresh as ever, and smiling, according to custom, entered the cabaret of the Parpaillot as the four friends were sitting down to breakfast, saying, as had been agreed upon : "M. Aramis, the answer from your cousin."

The four friends exchanged a joyful glance ; half of the work was done. It is true, however, that it was the shortest and the most easy part.

Aramis, blushing in spite of himself, took the letter, which was in a large, coarse hand, and not particular for its orthography.

"Good God !" cried he, laughing, "I quite despair of my poor Michon ; she will never write like M. de Voiture."

"What does you mean by boor Michon?" said the Swiss, who was chatting with the four friends when the letter came.

"Oh, *pardieu*, less than nothing," said Aramis ; "a charming little seamstress, whom I love dearly, and from whose hand I requested a few lines as a sort of keepsake."

"The duvil !" said the Swiss, "if she iz as great lady as her writing is large, you are a lucky fellow, gomrade !"

Aramis read the letter, and passed it to Athos.

"See what she writes to me, Athos," said he.

Athos cast a glance over the epistle, and to disperse all the suspicions that might have been created, read aloud : —

MY COUSIN, — My sister and I are skilful in interpreting dreams, and even entertain great fear of them ; but of yours it may be said, I hope, every dream is an illusion. Adieu ! Take care of yourself ; and act so that we may from time to time hear you spoken of.

MARIE MICHON.

"And what dream does she mean?" asked the dragoon, who had approached during the reading.

"Yez; vhat's the dream?" said the Swiss.

"Well, *pardieu!*" said Aramis, "it was only this: I had a dream, and I related it to her."

"Yez, yez," said the Swiss; "it's simple enough to dell a dream, but I neffer dream."

"You are very fortunate," said Athos, rising; "I wish I could say as much!"

"Neffor," replied the Swiss, enchanted that a man like Athos could envy him anything. "Neffor, neffer!"

D'Artagnan, seeing Athos rise, did likewise, took his arm, and went out.

Porthos and Aramis remained behind to encounter the jokes of the dragoon and the Swiss.

As to Bazin, he went and laid down on a truss of straw; and as he had more imagination than the Swiss, he dreamed that Aramis, having become pope, adorned his head with a cardinal's hat.

But, as we have said, Bazin had not, by his fortunate return, removed more than a part of the uneasiness which weighed upon the four friends. The days of expectation are long, and D'Artagnan, in particular, would have wagered that the days were forty-four hours. He forgot the necessary slowness of navigation; he exaggerated to himself the power of Milady. He credited this woman, who appeared to him the equal of a demon, with agents as supernatural as herself; at the least noise, he imagined himself about to be arrested, and that Planchet was being brought back to be confronted with himself and his friends. Still further, his confidence in the worthy Picard, at one time so great, diminished day by day. This anxiety became so great that it even extended to Aramis and Porthos. Athos alone remained unmoved, as if no

danger hovered over him, and as if he breathed his customary atmosphere.

On the sixteenth day, in particular, these signs were so strong in D'Artagnan and his two friends that they could not remain quiet in one place, and wandered about like ghosts on the road by which Planchet was expected.

"Really," said Athos to them, "you are not men, but children, to let a woman terrify you so ! And what does it amount to, after all ? To be imprisoned. Well, but we should be taken out of prison ; Madame Bonacieux was released. To be decapitated ? Why, every day in the trenches we go cheerfully to expose ourselves to worse than that, — for a bullet may break a leg, and I am convinced a surgeon would give us more pain in cutting off a thigh than an executioner in cutting off a head. Wait quietly, then ; in two hours, in four, in six hours at latest, Planchet will be here. He promised to be here, and I have very great faith in Planchet, who appears to me to be a very good lad."

"But if he does not come ?" said D'Artagnan.

"Well, if he does not come, it will be because he has been delayed, that's all. He may have fallen from his horse, he may have cut a caper from the deck ; he may have travelled so fast against the wind as to have brought on a violent catarrh. Eh, gentlemen, let us reckon upon accidents ! Life is a chaplet of little miseries which the philosopher counts with a smile. Be philosophers, as I am, gentlemen ; sit down at the table and let us drink. Nothing makes the future look so bright as surveying it through a glass of chambertin."

"That's all very well," replied D'Artagnan ; "but I am tired of fearing, when I open a fresh bottle, that the wine may come from the cellar of Milady."

"You are very fastidious," said Athos; "such a beautiful woman!"

"A woman of mark!" said Porthos, with his loud laugh.

Athos started, passed his hand over his brow to remove the drops of perspiration that burst forth, and rose in his turn with a nervous movement he could not repress.

The day, however, passed away; and the evening came on slowly, but finally it came. The bars were filled with drinkers. Athos, who had pocketed his share of the diamond, seldom quitted the Parpaillot. He had found in M. de Busigny, who, by the bye, had given them a magnificent dinner, a partner worthy of his company. They were playing together, as usual, when seven o'clock sounded; the patrol was heard passing to double the posts. At half-past seven the retreat was sounded.

"We are lost," said D'Artagnan, in the ear of Athos.

"You mean to say we *have* lost," said Athos, quietly, drawing four pistoles from his pocket, and throwing them upon the table. "Come, gentlemen," said he, "they are beating the tattoo. Let us to bed!"

And Athos went out of the Parpaillot, followed by D'Artagnan. Aramis came behind, giving his arm to Porthos. Aramis mumbled verses to himself, and Porthos from time to time pulled a hair or two from his mustache, in sign of despair.

But all at once a shadow appeared in the darkness the outline of which was familiar to D'Artagnan, and a well-known voice said, "Monsieur, I have brought your cloak; it is chilly this evening."

"Planchet!" cried D'Artagnan, beside himself with joy.

"Planchet!" repeated Aramis and Porthos.

"Well, yes, Planchet, to be sure," said Athos, "what is

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there so astonishing in that? He promised to be back by eight o'clock, and eight is striking. Bravo, Planchet, you are a lad of your word, and if ever you leave your master, I will promise you a place in my service."

"Oh, no, never," said Planchet, "I will never leave M. d'Artagnan."

At the same time D'Artagnan felt that Planchet slipped a note into his hand.

D'Artagnan felt a strong inclination to embrace Planchet as he had embraced him on his departure; but he feared lest this mark of affection, bestowed upon his lackey in the open street, might appear extraordinary to passers-by, and he restrained himself.

"I have the note," said he to Athos and to his friends.

"That's well," said Athos, "let us go home and read it."

The note burned the hand of D'Artagnan. He wished to hasten their steps; but Athos took his arm and passed it under his own, and the young man was forced to regulate his pace by that of his friend.

At length they reached the tent, lit a lamp, and while Planchet stood at the entrance that the four friends might not be surprised, D'Artagnan, with a trembling hand, broke the seal and opened the so anxiously expected letter.

It contained half a line, in a hand perfectly British, and with a conciseness as perfectly Spartan:—

"Thank you; be easy."

D'Artagnan translated this for the others.

Athos took the letter from the hands of D'Artagnan, approached the lamp, set fire to the paper, and did not let go till it was reduced to a cinder.

Then, calling Planchet, he said, "Now, my lad, you

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may claim your seven hundred livres, but you did not run much risk with such a note as that."

"I am not to blame for having tried every means to compress it," said Planchet.

"Well!" cried D'Artagnan, "tell us all about it."

"*Dame*, that's a long job, Monsieur."

"You are right, Planchet," said Athos; "besides, the tattoo has been sounded, and we should be observed if we kept a light burning much longer than the others."

"So be it," said D'Artagnan. "Go to bed, Planchet, and sleep soundly."

"My faith, Monsieur! that will be the first time I have done so for sixteen days."

"And me too!" said D'Artagnan.

"And me too!" said Porthos.

"And me too!" said Aramis.

"Well, if you will have the truth, and me too!" said Athos.

CHAPTER XIX.

FATALITY.

MEANTIME Milady, drunk with passion, roaring on the deck like a lioness that has been embarked, had been tempted to throw herself into the sea that she might regain the coast, for she could not get rid of the thought that she had been insulted by D'Artagnan, threatened by Athos, and that she had quitted France without being revenged on them. This idea soon became so insupportable to her that at the risk of whatever terrible consequences might result to herself from it, she implored the captain to put her on shore; but the captain, eager to escape from his false position, — placed between French and English cruisers, like the bat between the mice and the birds, — was in great haste to regain England, and positively refused to obey what he took for a woman's caprice, promising his passenger, who had been particularly recommended to him by the cardinal, to land her, if the sea and the French permitted him, at one of the ports of Brittany, either at Lorient or Brest. But the wind was contrary, the sea bad; they tacked, and kept off shore. Nine days after leaving the Charente, pale with fatigue and vexation, Milady saw only the blue coasts of Finistère appear.

She calculated that to cross this corner of France and return to the cardinal it would take her at least three days. Add another day for landing, and that would make four. Add these four to the nine others, that would be

thirteen days lost, — thirteen days, during which so many important events might pass in London. She reflected likewise that the cardinal would be furious at her return, and consequently would be more disposed to listen to the complaints brought against her than to the accusations she brought against others.

She allowed the vessel to pass Lorient and Brest without repeating her request to the captain who, on his part, took care not to remind her of it. Milady therefore continued her voyage, and on the very day that Planchet embarked at Portsmouth for France, the messenger of his Eminence entered the port in triumph.

All the city was agitated by an extraordinary movement. Four large vessels, recently built, had just been launched. At the end of the jetty, his clothes richly laced with gold, glittering, as was customary with him, with diamonds and precious stones, his hat ornamented with a white feather which drooped upon his shoulder, Buckingham was seen surrounded by a staff almost as brilliant as himself.

It was one of those rare and beautiful days in winter when England remembers that there is a sun. The star of day, pale, but nevertheless still splendid, was setting in the horizon, glorifying at once the heavens and the sea with bands of fire, and casting upon the towers and the old houses of the city a last ray of gold which made the windows sparkle like the reflection of a conflagration. Breathing that sea-breeze, so much more invigorating and balsamic as the land is approached, contemplating all the power of those preparations she was commissioned to destroy, all the power of that army which she was to combat alone, — she, a woman with a few bags of gold, — Milady compared herself mentally to Judith, the terrible Jewess, when she penetrated the camp of the Assyrians

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and beheld the enormous mass of chariots, horses, men, and arms, which a gesture of her hand was to dissipate like a cloud of smoke.

They entered the roadstead ; but as they drew near in order to cast anchor, a little cutter, looking like a coast-guard formidably armed, approached the merchant-vessel and dropped into the sea a boat which directed its course to the ladder. This boat contained an officer, a mate, and eight rowers. The officer alone went on board, where he was received with all the deference inspired by the uniform.

The officer conversed a few instants with the captain, gave him several papers, of which he was the bearer, to read, and upon the order of the merchant-captain the whole crew of the vessel, both passengers and sailors, were called upon deck.

When this species of summons was made the officer inquired aloud the point of the brig's departure, its route, its landings ; and to all these questions the captain replied without difficulty and without hesitation. Then the officer began to pass in review all the people, one after the other, and stopping when he came to Milady, surveyed her very closely, but without addressing a single word to her.

He then returned to the captain, said a few words to him, and as if from that moment the vessel was under his command, he ordered a manœuvre which the crew executed immediately. Then the vessel resumed its course, still escorted by the little cutter, which sailed side by side with it, menacing it with the mouths of its six cannon. The boat followed in the wake of the ship, a speck near the enormous mass.

During the examination of Milady by the officer, as may well be imagined, Milady on her part was not less scrutinizing in her glances. But however great was the

power of this woman with eyes of flame in reading the hearts of those whose secrets she wished to divine, she met this time with a countenance of such impassibility that no discovery followed her investigation. The officer who had stopped in front of her and studied her with so much care might have been twenty-five or twenty-six years of age. He was of pale complexion, with clear blue eyes, rather deeply set; his mouth, fine and well cut, remained motionless in its correct lines; his chin, strongly marked, denoted that strength of will which in the ordinary Britannic type denotes mostly nothing but obstinacy; a brow a little receding, as is proper for poets, enthusiasts, and soldiers, was scarcely shaded by short thin hair which, like the beard which covered the lower part of his face, was of a beautiful deep chestnut color.

When they entered the port, it was already night. The fog increased the darkness, and formed round the stern-lights and lanterns of the jetty a circle like that which surrounds the moon when the weather threatens to become rainy. The air they breathed was heavy, damp, and cold.

Milady, that woman so courageous and firm, shivered in spite of herself.

The officer desired to have Milady's packages pointed out to him, and ordered them to be placed in the boat. When this operation was complete, he invited her to descend by offering her his hand.

Milady looked at this man, and hesitated. "Who are you, sir," asked she, "who has the kindness to trouble yourself so particularly on my account?"

"You may perceive, Madame, by my uniform, that I am an officer in the English navy," replied the young man.

"But is it the custom for the officers in the English navy to place themselves at the service of their female com-

patriots when they land in a port of Great Britain, and carry their gallantry so far as to conduct them ashore ? ”

“ Yes, Madame, it is the custom, not from gallantry but prudence, that in time of war foreigners should be conducted to particular hôtels, in order that they may remain under the eye of the government until full information can be obtained about them.”

These words were pronounced with the most exact politeness and the most perfect calmness. Nevertheless, they had not the power of convincing Milady.

“ But I am not a foreigner, sir,” said she, with an accent as pure as ever was heard between Portsmouth and Manchester ; “ my name is Lady Clarik, and this measure — ”

“ This measure is general, Madame ; and you will seek in vain to evade it.”

“ I will follow you, then, sir.”

Accepting the hand of the officer, she began the descent of the ladder, at the foot of which the boat waited. The officer followed her. A large cloak was spread at the stern ; the officer requested her to sit down upon this cloak, and placed himself beside her.

“ Row ! ” said he to the sailors.

The eight oars fell at once into the sea, making but a single sound, giving but a single stroke, and the boat seemed to fly over the surface of the water.

In five minutes they gained the land.

The officer leaped to the pier, and offered his hand to Milady. A carriage was in waiting.

“ Is this carriage for us ? ” asked Milady.

“ Yes, Madame,” replied the officer.

“ The hôtel, then, is far away ? ”

“ At the other end of the town.”

“ Very well,” said Milady ; and she resolutely entered the carriage.

The officer saw that the baggage was fastened carefully behind the carriage ; and this operation ended, he took his place beside Milady, and shut the door.

Immediately, without any order being given or his place of destination indicated, the coachman set off at a rapid pace, and plunged into the streets of the city.

So strange a reception naturally gave Milady ample matter for reflection ; so seeing that the young officer did not seem at all disposed for conversation, she reclined in her corner of the carriage, and one after the other passed in review all the surmises which presented themselves to her mind.

At the end of a quarter of an hour, however, surprised at the length of the journey, she leaned forward towards the door to see whither she was being conducted. Houses were no longer to be seen ; trees appeared in the darkness like great black phantoms chasing one another. Milady shuddered.

“ But we are no longer in the city, sir,” said she.

The young officer preserved silence.

“ I beg you to understand, sir, I will go no farther, unless you tell me whither you are taking me.”

This threat brought no reply.

“ Oh, this is too much,” cried Milady. “ Help ! help ! ”

No voice replied to hers ; the carriage continued to roll on with rapidity ; the officer seemed a statue.

Milady looked at the officer with one of those terrible expressions peculiar to her countenance, and which so rarely failed of their effect ; anger made her eyes flash in the darkness.

The young man remained immovable.

Milady tried to open the door in order to throw herself out.

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“Take care, Madame,” said the young man, coolly, “you will kill yourself in jumping.”

Milady re-seated herself, foaming. The officer leaned forward, looked at her in his turn, and appeared surprised to see that face, just before so beautiful, distorted with passion and almost hideous. The artful creature at once comprehended that she was injuring herself by allowing him thus to read her soul ; she collected her features, and in a complaining voice said :—

“In the name of Heaven, sir, tell me if it is to you, if it is to your government, if it is to an enemy I am to attribute the violence that is done me?”

“No violence will be offered to you, Madame, and what happens to you is the result of a very simple measure which we are obliged to adopt with all who land in England.”

“Then you don’t know me, sir?”

“It is the first time I have had the honor of seeing you.”

“And on your honor, you have no cause of hatred against me?”

“None, I swear to you.”

There was so much serenity, coolness, mildness even, in the voice of the young man, that Milady felt re-assured.

At length after a journey of nearly an hour, the carriage stopped before an iron gate, which closed an avenue leading to a castle severe in form, massive, and isolated. Then, as the wheels rolled over a fine gravel, Milady could hear a vast roaring, which she at once recognized as the noise of the sea dashing against some steep cliff.

The carriage passed under two arched gateways, and at length stopped in a court large, dark, and square. Almost immediately the door of the carriage was opened, the young

man sprang lightly out and presented his hand to Milady, who leaned upon it, and in her turn alighted with tolerable calmness.

"Still, then, I am a prisoner," said Milady, looking around her, and bringing back her eyes with a most gracious smile to the young officer; "but I feel assured it will not be for long," added she. "My own conscience and your politeness, sir, are the guarantees of that."

However flattering this compliment, the officer made no reply; but drawing from his belt a little silver whistle, such as boatswains use in ships-of-war, he whistled three times, with three different modulations. Immediately several men appeared, who unharnessed the smoking horses, and put the carriage into a coach-house.

Then the officer, with the same calm politeness, invited his prisoner to enter the house. She, with a still smiling countenance, took his arm, and passed with him under a low arched door, which by a vaulted passage, lighted only at the farther end, led to a stone staircase around an angle of stone. They then came to a massive door, which after the introduction into the lock of a key which the young man carried with him, turned heavily upon its hinges, and disclosed the chamber destined for Milady.

With a single glance the prisoner took in the apartment in its minutest details. It was a chamber whose furniture was at once appropriate for a prisoner or a free man; and yet bars at the windows and outside bolts at the door decided the question in favor of the prison.

In an instant all the strength of mind of this creature, though drawn from the most vigorous sources, abandoned her; she sank into a large easy-chair, with her arms crossed, her head lowered, and expecting every instant to see a judge enter to interrogate her.

But no one entered except two or three marines, who

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brought her trunks and packages, deposited them in a corner, and retired without speaking.

The officer superintended all these details with the same calmness Milady had constantly seen in him, never pronouncing a word himself, and making himself obeyed by a gesture of his hand or a sound of his whistle.

It might have been said that between this man and his inferiors spoken language did not exist, or had become useless.

At length Milady could hold out no longer ; she broke the silence. "In the name of Heaven, sir," cried she, "what means all that is passing? Put an end to my doubts ; I have courage enough for any danger I can foresee, for every misfortune which I understand. Where am I, and why am I here? If I am free, why these bars and these doors? If I am a prisoner, what crime have I committed?"

"You are here in the apartment destined for you, Madame. I received orders to go and take charge of you on the sea, and to conduct you to this castle. This order I believe I have accomplished with all the exactness of a soldier, but also with the courtesy of a gentleman. There terminates, at least to the present moment, the duty I had to fulfil towards you ; the rest concerns another person."

"And who is that other person?" asked Milady, warmly. "Can you not tell me his name?"

At the moment a great jingling of spurs was heard on the stairs. Some voices passed and faded away, and the sound of a single footstep approached the door.

"That person is here, Madame," said the officer, leaving the entrance open, and drawing himself up in an attitude of respect.

At the same time the door opened ; a man appeared on

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the threshold. He was without a hat, carried a sword, and flourished a handkerchief in his hand.

Milady thought she recognized this shadow in the gloom; she supported herself with one hand upon the arm of the chair, and advanced her head as if to meet a certainty.

The stranger advanced slowly, and as he advanced, after entering into the circle of light projected by the lamp, Milady involuntarily drew back.

Then when she had no longer any doubt, she cried, in a state of stupor, "What, my brother, is it you?"

"Yes, fair lady!" replied Lord de Winter, making a bow, half courteous, half ironical; "it is I, myself."

"But this castle, then?"

"Is mine."

"This chamber?"

"Is yours."

"I am, then, your prisoner?"

"Nearly so."

"But this is a frightful abuse of power!"

"No high-sounding words! Let us sit down and chat quietly, as brother and sister ought to do."

Then, turning towards the door, and seeing that the young officer was waiting for his last orders, he said, "All is well, I thank you; now leave us alone, Mr. Felton."

CHAPTER XX.

CHAT OF A BROTHER WITH A SISTER.

DURING the time which Lord de Winter took to shut the door, close a shutter, and draw a chair near to his sister-in-law's *fauteuil*, Milady, anxiously thoughtful, plunged her glance into the depths of possibility, and discovered all the plan, of which she could not even obtain a glance as long as she was ignorant into whose hands she had fallen. She knew her brother-in-law to be a worthy gentleman, a bold hunter, an intrepid player, enterprising with women, but by no means remarkable for his skill in intrigues. How had he discovered her arrival, and caused her to be seized? Why did he detain her?

Athos had dropped some words which proved that the conversation she had with the cardinal had fallen into outside ears; but she could not suppose that he had dug a counter-mine so promptly and so boldly. She rather feared that her preceding operations in England might have been discovered. Buckingham might have guessed that it was she who had cut off the two studs, and avenge himself for that little treachery; but Buckingham was incapable of going to any excess against a woman, particularly if that woman was supposed to have acted from a feeling of jealousy.

This supposition appeared to her most reasonable. It seemed to her that they wanted to revenge the past, and not to anticipate the future. At all events, she congrat-

ulated herself upon having fallen into the hands of her brother-in-law, with whom she reckoned she could deal very easily, rather than into the hands of an acknowledged and intelligent enemy.

"Yes, let us chat, Brother," said she, with a kind of cheerfulness, decided as she was to draw from the conversation, in spite of all the dissimulation Lord de Winter could bring, the revelations of which she stood in need to regulate her future conduct.

"You have then decided to come to England again," said Lord de Winter, "in spite of the resolutions you so often expressed in Paris, never to set your feet on British ground?"

Milady replied to this question by another question. "To begin with, tell me," said she, "how you have watched me so closely as to be aware beforehand not only of my arrival, but even of the day, the hour, and the port at which I should arrive?"

Lord de Winter adopted the same tactics as Milady, thinking that as his sister-in-law employed them they must be the best.

"But tell me, my dear sister," replied he, "what makes you come to England?"

"I come to see you," replied Milady, without knowing how much she aggravated by this reply the suspicions to which D'Artagnan's letter had given birth in the mind of her brother-in-law, and only desiring to gain the goodwill of her auditor by a falsehood.

"Ah, to see me?" said De Winter, cunningly.

"To be sure, to see you. What is there astonishing in that?"

"And you had no other object in coming to England but to see me?"

"No."

“So it was for me alone you have taken the trouble to cross the Channel?”

“For you alone.”

“The deuce! What tenderness, my sister!”

“But am I not your nearest relative?” demanded Milady, with a tone of the most touching ingenuousness.

“And my only heir, are you not?” said Lord de Winter in his turn, fixing his eyes on those of Milady.

Whatever command she had over herself, Milady could not help starting; and as in pronouncing the last words Lord de Winter placed his hand upon the arm of his sister, this start did not escape him.

In fact, the blow was direct and severe. The first idea that occurred to Milady’s mind was that she had been betrayed by Kitty, and that she had recounted to the baron the selfish aversion towards himself of which she had imprudently allowed some marks to escape before her servant. She also recollected the furious and imprudent attack she had made upon D’Artagnan when he spared the life of her brother.

“I do not comprehend, my Lord,” said she, in order to gain time and make her adversary speak out. “What do you mean to say? Is there any secret meaning concealed beneath your words?”

“Oh, my God, no!” said Lord de Winter, with apparent good-nature. “You wish to see me, and you come to England. I learn this desire, or rather I suspect that you feel it; and in order to spare you all the annoyances of a nocturnal arrival in a port, and all the fatigues of landing, I send one of my officers to meet you, I place a carriage at his orders, and he brings you hither to this castle, of which I am governor, whither I come every day, and where, in order to satisfy our mutual desire of seeing each other, I have prepared you a chamber. What is there

more astonishing in all that I have said to you than in what you have told me?"

"No; what I think astonishing is that you should expect my coming."

"And yet that is the most simple thing in the world, my dear sister. Have you not observed that the captain of your little vessel, on entering the roadstead, sent forward, in order to obtain permission to enter the port, a little boat bearing his log-book and the register of his voyagers? I am commandant of the port. They brought me that book. I recognized your name in it. My heart told me what your mouth has just confirmed, — that is to say, with what view you have exposed yourself to the dangers of a sea so perilous, or at least so troublesome at this moment, — and I sent my cutter to meet you. You know the rest."

Milady knew that Lord de Winter lied, and she was the more alarmed.

"My brother," continued she, "was not that my Lord Buckingham whom I saw on the jetty this evening, as we arrived?"

"Himself. Ah, I can understand how the sight of him struck you," replied Lord de Winter. "You came from a country where he must be very much talked of, and I know that his armaments against France greatly engage the attention of your friend the cardinal."

"My friend the cardinal!" cried Milady, seeing that on this point as on the other Lord de Winter seemed well instructed.

"Is he not your friend?" replied the baron, negligently. "Ah, pardon! I thought so; but we will return to my Lord Duke presently. Let us not depart from the sentimental turn our conversation had taken. You came, you say, to see me?"

"Yes."

"Well, I reply that you shall be served to the height of your wishes, and that we shall see each other every day."

"Am I then to remain here eternally?" demanded Milady, with a certain terror.

"Do you find yourself badly lodged, Sister? Demand anything you want, and I will hasten to have you furnished with it."

"But I have neither my women nor my servants."

"You shall have all, Madame. Tell me on what footing your household was established by your first husband, and although I am only your brother-in-law, I will arrange one similar."

"My first husband!" cried Milady, looking at Lord de Winter with eyes almost starting from their sockets.

"Yes, your French husband. I don't speak of my brother. If you have forgotten, as he is still living, I can write to him and he will send me information on the subject."

A cold sweat burst from the brow of Milady.

"You jest!" said she, in a hollow voice.

"Do I look so?" asked the baron, rising and going a step backwards.

"Or rather you insult me," continued she, pressing with her stiffened hands the two arms of her easy-chair, and raising herself upon her wrists.

"I insult you!" said Lord de Winter, with contempt. "In truth, Madame, do you think that can be possible?"

"Indeed, sir," said Milady, "you must be either drunk or mad. Leave the room, and send me a woman."

"Women are very indiscreet, my sister. Cannot I serve you as a waiting-maid? By that means all our secrets will remain in the family."



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"Insolent!" cried Milady; and as if acted upon by a spring, she bounded towards the baron, who awaited her attack with his arms crossed, but nevertheless with one hand on the hilt of his sword.

"Come!" said he. "I know you are accustomed to assassinate people; but I warn you I shall defend myself, even against you."

"You are right," said Milady. "You have all the appearance of being cowardly enough to lift your hand against a woman."

"Perhaps so; and I have an excuse, for mine would not be the first hand of a man that has been placed upon you, I imagine."

And the baron pointed, with a slow and accusing gesture, to the left shoulder of Milady, which he almost touched with his finger.

Milady uttered a deep inward shriek, and retreated to a corner of the room like a panther which crouches for a spring.

"Oh, growl as much as you please," cried Lord de Winter, "but don't try to bite, for I warn you that it would be to your disadvantage. There are here no procurators who regulate successions beforehand. There is no knight-errant to come and seek a quarrel with me on account of the fair lady I detain a prisoner; but I have judges quite ready who will quickly dispose of a woman so shameless as to glide, a bigamist, into the bed of Lord de Winter, my brother. And these judges, I warn you, will soon send you to an executioner who will make both your shoulders alike."

The eyes of Milady darted such flashes that although he was a man and armed before an unarmed woman, he felt the chill of fear glide through his whole frame. However, he continued all the same, but with increasing

warmth: "Yes, I can very well understand that after having inherited the fortune of my brother it would be very agreeable to you to be my heir likewise; but know beforehand, if you kill me, or cause me to be killed, my precautions are taken. Not a penny of what I possess will pass into your hands. Were you not already rich enough, — you who possess nearly a million? And could you not stop your fatal career, if you did not do evil for the infinite and supreme joy of doing it? Oh, be assured, if the memory of my brother were not sacred to me, you should rot in a State dungeon, or satisfy the curiosity of sailors at Tyburn. I will be silent, but you must endure your captivity quietly. In fifteen or twenty days I shall set out for Rochelle with the army; but on the eve of my departure a vessel which I shall see depart will take you hence and convey you to our colonies in the south. And be assured that you shall be accompanied by one who will blow your brains out at the first attempt you make to return to England or the Continent."

Milady listened with an attention that dilated her inflamed eyes.

"Yes, at present," continued Lord de Winter, "you will remain in this castle. The walls are thick, the doors strong, and the bars solid; besides, your window opens immediately over the sea. The men of my crew, who are devoted to me for life and death, mount guard around this apartment, and watch all the passages that lead to the courtyard. Even if you gained the yard, there would still be three iron gates for you to pass. The order is positive. A step, a gesture, a word, on your part, denoting an effort to escape, and you are to be fired upon. If they kill you, English justice will be under an obligation to me for having saved it trouble. Ah! I see your features regain their calmness, your countenance recovers its

assurance. You are saying to yourself: 'Fifteen days, twenty days? Bah! I have an inventive mind; before that is expired some idea will occur to me. I have an infernal spirit. I shall meet with a victim. Before fifteen days are gone by I shall be away from here.' Ah, try it!"

Milady, finding her thoughts betrayed, dug her nails into her flesh to subdue every emotion that might give to her face any expression except agony.

Lord de Winter continued: "The officer who commands here in my absence you have already seen, and therefore know him. He knows how, as you must have observed, to obey an order, — for you did not, I am sure, come from Portsmouth hither without endeavoring to make him speak. What do you say of him? Could a statue of marble have been more impassible and more mute? You have already tried the power of your seductions upon many men, and unfortunately you have always succeeded; but I give you leave to try them upon this one. *Pardieu!* if you succeed with him, I pronounce you the demon himself."

He went towards the door and opened it hastily.

"Call Mr. Felton," said he. "Wait a minute longer, and I will introduce him to you."

There followed between these two personages a strange silence, during which the sound of a slow and regular step was heard approaching. Shortly, a human form appeared in the shade of the corridor, and the young lieutenant, with whom we are already acquainted, stopped at the threshold to receive the orders of the baron.

"Come in, my dear John," said Lord de Winter, — "come in, and shut the door."

The young officer entered.

"Now," said the baron, "look at this woman. She is

young ; she is beautiful ; she possesses all earthly seductions. Well, she is a monster, who, at twenty-five years of age, has been guilty of as many crimes as you could read of in a year in the archives of our tribunals. Her voice prejudices her hearers in her favor ; her beauty serves as a bait to her victims ; her body even pays what she promises, — I must do her that justice. She will try to seduce you, perhaps she will try to kill you. I have extricated you from misery, Felton ; I have caused you to be named lieutenant ; I once saved your life, you know on what occasion. I am for you not only a protector, but a friend ; not only a benefactor, but a father. This woman has come back again into England for the purpose of conspiring against my life. I hold this serpent in my hands. Well, I call you, and say to you : Friend Felton, John, my child, guard me, and more particularly guard yourself, against this woman. Swear, by your hopes of salvation, to keep her safely for the chastisement she has merited. John Felton, I trust your word ! John Felton, I put faith in your loyalty !”

“ My Lord,” said the young officer, summoning to his mild countenance all the hatred he could find in his heart, — “ my Lord, I swear all shall be done as you desire.”

Milady received this look like a resigned victim ; it was impossible to imagine a more submissive or a more mild expression than that which prevailed on her beautiful countenance. Lord de Winter himself could scarcely recognize the tigress who, a minute before, prepared apparently for a fight.

“ She is not to leave this chamber, understand, John,” continued the baron. “ She is to correspond with nobody ; she is to speak to no one but you, — if you will do her the honor to address a word to her.”

“ That is sufficient, my Lord ! I have sworn.”

“ And now, Madame, try to make your peace with God, for you are judged by men ! ”

Milady let her head sink, as if crushed by this sentence. Lord de Winter went out, making a sign to Felton, who followed him, shutting the door after him.

One instant after, the heavy step of a marine who served as sentinel was heard in the corridor, — his axe in his girdle and his musket on his shoulder.

Milady remained for some minutes in the same position, for she thought they might perhaps be examining her through the keyhole; she then slowly raised her head, which had resumed its formidable expression of menace and defiance, ran to the door to listen, looked out of her window, and returning to bury herself again in her large armchair, she reflected.

CHAPTER XXI.

OFFICER.

MEANWHILE, the cardinal looked anxiously for news from England ; but no news arrived that was not annoying and threatening.

Although Rochelle was invested, however certain success might appear, — thanks to the precautions taken, and above all to the dike, which prevented the entrance of any vessel into the besieged city, — the blockade might last a long time yet. This was a great affront to the king's army, and a great inconvenience to the cardinal, who had no longer, it is true, to embroil Louis XIII. with Anne of Austria, — for that affair was over, — but he had to adjust matters for M. de Bassompierre, who was embroiled with the Duc d'Angoulême.

As to Monsieur, who had begun the siege, he left to the cardinal the task of finishing it.

The city, notwithstanding the incredible perseverance of its mayor, had attempted a sort of mutiny for a surrender ; the mayor had hung the mutineers. This execution quieted the ill-disposed, who resolved to allow themselves to die of hunger, — this death always appearing to them more slow and less sure than strangulation.

On their side, from time to time, the besiegers took the messengers which the Rochellais sent to Buckingham, or the spies which Buckingham sent to the Rochellais. In one case or the other, the trial was soon over. The cardinal pronounced the single word, " Hanged ! " The

king was invited to come and see the hanging. He came languidly, placing himself in a good situation to see all the details. This amused him sometimes a little, and made him endure the siege with patience ; but it did not prevent his getting very tired, or from talking at every moment of returning to Paris, — so that if the messengers and the spies had failed, his Eminence, notwithstanding all his inventiveness, would have found himself much embarrassed.

Nevertheless, time passed on, and the Rochellais did not surrender. The last spy that was taken was the bearer of a letter. This letter told Buckingham that the city was at an extremity ; but instead of adding, "If your succor does not arrive within fifteen days, we will surrender," it added, quite simply, "If your succor comes not within fifteen days, we shall all be dead with hunger when it comes."

The Rochellais, then, had no hope but in Buckingham. Buckingham was their Messiah. It was evident that if they one day learned positively that they must not count on Buckingham, their courage would fail with their hope.

The cardinal looked, then, with great impatience for the news from England which would announce to him that Buckingham would not come.

The question of carrying the city by assault, though often debated in the council of the king, had been always rejected. In the first place, Rochelle appeared impregnable. Then the cardinal, whatever he said, very well knew that the horror of bloodshed in this encounter, in which Frenchman would combat against Frenchman, was a retrograde movement of sixty years impressed upon his policy ; and the cardinal was at that period what we now call a man of progress. In fact, the sack of Rochelle, and the assassination of three or four thousand Huguenots who

allowed themselves to be killed, would resemble too closely, in 1628, the massacre of St. Bartholomew in 1572; and then, above all this, this extreme measure, which was not at all repugnant to the king, good Catholic as he was, always fell before this argument of the besieging generals, — Rochelle is impregnable except to famine.

The cardinal could not drive from his mind the fear he entertained of his terrible emissary, — for he comprehended the strange qualities of this woman, sometimes a serpent, sometimes a lion. Had she betrayed him? Was she dead? He knew her well enough in all cases to know that, whether acting for or against him, as a friend or an enemy, she would not remain motionless without great impediments; but whence did these impediments arise? That was what he could not know.

And yet he reckoned, and with reason, on Milady. He had divined, in the past of this woman, terrible things which his red mantle alone could cover; and he felt, from one cause or another, that this woman was his own, as she could look to no other but himself for a support superior to the danger which threatened her.

He resolved, then, to carry on the war alone, and to look for no success foreign to himself, but as we look for a fortunate chance. He continued to press the raising of the famous dike which was to starve Rochelle. Meanwhile, he cast his eyes over that unfortunate city, which contained so much deep misery and so many heroic virtues, and recalling the saying of Louis XI., his political predecessor, as he himself was the predecessor of Robespierre, he repeated this maxim of Tristan's gossip: "Divide in order to reign."

Henry IV., when besieging Paris, had loaves and provisions thrown over the walls. The cardinal had little notes thrown over in which he represented to the Rochel-

lais how unjust, selfish, and barbarous was the conduct of their leaders. These leaders had corn in abundance, and would not let them partake of it; they adopted as a maxim — for they too had maxims — that it was of very little consequence that women, children, and old men should die, so long as the men who were to defend the walls remained strong and healthy. Up to that time, whether from devotedness or from want of power to act against it, this maxim, without being generally adopted, nevertheless passed from theory into practice; but the notes did it injury. The notes reminded the men that the children, women, and old men whom they allowed to die were their sons, their wives, and their fathers, and that it would be more just for every one to be reduced to the common misery, in order that equal conditions should give birth to unanimous resolutions.

These notes had all the effect that he who wrote them could expect, in that they induced a great number of the inhabitants to open private negotiations with the royal army.

But at the moment when the cardinal saw his means already fructify, and applauded himself for having put it in action, an inhabitant of Rochelle who had contrived to pass the royal lines — God knows how, such was the watchfulness of Bassompierre, Schomberg, and the Duc d'Angoulême, themselves watched over by the cardinal — an inhabitant of Rochelle, we say, entered the city, coming from Portsmouth, and saying that he had seen a magnificent fleet ready to sail within eight days. Still further, Buckingham announced to the mayor that at length the great league was about to declare itself against France, and that the kingdom would be at once invaded by the English, Imperial, and Spanish armies. This letter was read publicly in all parts of the city. Copies were put up

at the corners of the streets; and even they who had begun to open negotiations interrupted them, being resolved to await the succor so pompously announced.

This unexpected circumstance brought back Richelieu's former anxiety, and forced him in spite of himself once more to turn his eyes to the other side of the sea.

During this time, exempt from the anxiety of its only and true chief, the royal army led a joyous life, neither provisions nor money being wanting in the camp. All the corps rivalled one another in audacity and gayety. To take spies and hang them, to make hazardous expeditions upon the dike or the sea, to imagine wild plans, and to execute them coolly,—such were the pastimes which made the army find these days short which were not only so long to the Rochellais, a prey to famine and anxiety, but even to the cardinal, who blockaded them so closely.

Sometimes when the cardinal, always on horseback, like the lowest *gendarme* of the army, cast a pensive glance over those works, so slowly keeping pace with his wishes, which the engineers, brought from all the corners of France, were executing under his orders, if he met a musketeer of the company of Tréville, he drew near and looked at him in a peculiar manner, and not recognizing in him one of our four companions, he turned his penetrating look and profound thoughts in another direction.

One day when oppressed with a mortal weariness of mind, without hope in the negotiations with the city, without news from England, the cardinal went out, without any other aim than to be out of doors, and accompanied only by Cahunac and La Houdinière, strolled along the beach. Mingling the immensity of his dreams with the immensity of the ocean, he came, his horse going at a foot's pace, to a hill from the top of which he

perceived behind a hedge, reclining on the sand, and catching in its passage one of those rays of the sun so rare at this period of the year, seven men surrounded by empty bottles. Four of these men were our musketeers, preparing to listen to a letter one of them had just received. This letter was so important that it made them forsake their cards and their dice on the drum-head.

The other three were occupied in opening an enormous flagon of Collioure wine; these were the lackeys of these gentlemen.

The cardinal was, as we have said, in very low spirits; and nothing when he was in that state of mind increased his depression so much as gayety in others. Besides, he had another strange fancy, which was always to believe that the causes of his sadness created the gayety of others. Making a sign to La Houdinière and Cahusac to stop, he alighted from his horse, and went towards these suspected merry companions, hoping, by means of the sand which deadened the sound of his steps, and of the hedge which concealed his approach, to catch some words of this conversation which appeared so interesting. At ten paces from the hedge he recognized the talkative Gascon; and as he had already perceived that these men were musketeers, he did not doubt that the three others were those called the Inseparables; that is to say, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis.

It may be supposed that his desire to hear the conversation was augmented by this discovery. His eyes took a strange expression, and with the step of a tiger-cat he advanced towards the hedge; but he had not been able to catch more than a few vague syllables without any positive sense, when a sonorous and short cry made him start, and attracted the attention of the musketeers.

“Officer!” cried Grimaud.

"You are speaking, you scoundrel!" said Athos, rising upon his elbow, and transfixing Grimaud with his flaming look.

Grimaud therefore added nothing to his speech, but contented himself with pointing his index finger in the direction of the hedge, announcing by this gesture the cardinal and his escort.

With a single bound the musketeers were on their feet, and saluted with respect.

The cardinal seemed furious.

"It appears that Messieurs the Musketeers keep guard," said he. "Are the English expected by land, or do the musketeers consider themselves superior officers?"

"Monseigneur," replied Athos, for amid the general fright he alone had preserved the noble calmness and coolness that never forsook him, — "Monseigneur, the musketeers, when they are not on duty, or when their duty is over, drink and play at dice, and they are certainly superior officers to their lackeys."

"Lackeys?" grumbled the cardinal. "Lackeys who have the order to warn their masters when any one passes are not lackeys, they are sentinels."

"Your Eminence may perceive that if we had not taken this precaution, we should have been exposed to allowing you to pass without presenting you our respects, or offering you our thanks for the favor you have done us in uniting us. D'Artagnan," continued Athos, "you, who but lately were so anxious for such an opportunity for expressing your gratitude to Monseigneur, here it is; avail yourself of it."

These words were pronounced with that imperturbable phlegm which distinguished Athos in the hour of danger, and with that excessive politeness which made of him at certain moments a king more majestic than kings by birth.

D'Artagnan came forward and stammered out a few words of gratitude which soon expired under the gloomy looks of the cardinal.

"It does not signify, gentlemen," continued the cardinal, without appearing to be in the least swerved from his first intention by the diversion which Athos had started, — "it does not signify, gentlemen. I do not like to have simple soldiers, because they have the advantage of serving in a privileged corps, thus to play the great lords; discipline is the same for them as for everybody else."

Athos allowed the cardinal to finish his sentence completely, and bowed in sign of assent. Then he resumed in his turn: "Discipline, Monseigneur, has, I hope, in no way been forgotten by us. We are not on duty, and we believed that not being on duty we were at liberty to dispose of our time as we pleased. If we are so fortunate as to have some particular duty to perform for your Eminence, we are ready to obey you. Your Eminence may perceive," continued Athos, knitting his brow, for this sort of investigation began to annoy him, "that we have not come out without our arms."

And he showed the cardinal, with his finger, the four muskets piled near the drum, on which were the cards and dice.

"Your Eminence may believe," added D'Artagnan, "that we would have come to meet you, if we could have supposed it was Monseigneur coming towards us with so few attendants."

The cardinal bit his mustache, and even his lips a little.

"Do you know what you look like, all together, as you are, armed and guarded by your lackeys?" said the cardinal. "You look like four conspirators."

"Oh, as to that, Monseigneur, it is true," said Athos; "we do conspire, as your Eminence might have seen

the other morning. Only we conspire against the Rochellais."

"Ah, you gentlemen of policy!" replied the cardinal, knitting his brow in his turn, "the secret of many unknown things might perhaps be found in your brains, if we could read them as you read that letter which you concealed as soon as you saw me coming."

The color mounted to the face of Athos, and he made a step towards his Eminence.

"One might think you really suspected us, Monseigneur, and we were undergoing a real interrogatory. If it be so, we trust your Eminence will deign to explain yourself, and we should then at least be acquainted with our real position."

"And if it were an interrogatory!" replied the cardinal. "Others besides you have undergone such, M. Athos, and have replied thereto."

"Thus I have told your Eminence that you had but to question us, and we are ready to reply."

"What was that letter you were about to read, M. Aramis, and which you so promptly concealed?"

"A woman's letter, Monseigneur."

"Ah, yes, I see," said the cardinal; "we must be discreet with this sort of letters; but nevertheless, we may show them to a confessor, and you know I have taken orders."

"Monseigneur," said Athos, with a calmness the more terrible because he risked his head in making this reply, "the letter is a woman's letter, but it is neither signed Marion de Lorme, nor Madame d'Aiguillon."

The cardinal became as pale as death; lightning darted from his eyes. He turned round as if to give an order to Cahusac and Houdinière. Athos saw the movement; he made a step towards the muskets, upon which the other

three friends had fixed their eyes, like men ill-disposed to allow themselves to be taken. The cardinalists were three ; the musketeers, lackeys included, were seven. He judged that the match would be so much the less equal, if Athos and his companions were really plotting ; and by one of those rapid turns which he always had at command, all his anger faded away into a smile.

"Well, well !" said he, "you are brave young men, proud in daylight, faithful in darkness. We can find no fault with you for watching over yourselves, when you watch so carefully over others. Gentlemen, I have not forgotten the night in which you served me as an escort to the Red Dovecot. If there were any danger to be apprehended on the road I am going, I would request you to accompany me ; but as there is none, remain where you are, finish your bottles, your game, and your letter. Adieu, gentlemen !"

And remounting his horse, which Cahusac led to him, he saluted them with his hand, and rode away.

The four young men, standing and motionless, followed him with their eyes without speaking a single word until he had disappeared. Then they looked at one another.

The countenances of all gave evidence of terror, for notwithstanding the friendly adieu of his Eminence, they plainly perceived that the cardinal went away with rage in his heart.

Athos alone smiled, with a self-possessed, disdainful smile.

When the cardinal was out of hearing and sight, "That Grimaud kept bad watch !" cried Porthos, who had a great inclination to vent his ill-humor on somebody.

Grimaud was about to reply to excuse himself. Athos lifted his finger, and Grimaud was silent.

"Would you have given up the letter, Aramis?" said D'Artagnan.

"I," said Aramis, in his most flutelike tone, — "I had made up my mind. If he had insisted upon the letter being given up to him, I would have presented the letter to him with one hand, and with the other I would have run my sword through his body."

"I expected as much," said Athos; "and that was why I threw myself between you and him. Indeed, this man is very much to blame for talking thus to other men; one would say he had never had to do with any but women and children."

"My dear Athos, I admire you, but nevertheless, we were in the wrong, after all."

"How, in the wrong?" said Athos. "Whose, then, is the air we breathe? Whose is the ocean upon which we look? Whose is the sand upon which we were reclining? Whose is that letter of your mistress? Do these belong to the cardinal? Upon my honor, this man fancies the world belongs to him. There you stood, stammering, stupefied, annihilated. One might have supposed the Bastille appeared before you, and that the gigantic Medusa had converted you into stone. Is being in love conspiring? You are in love with a woman whom the cardinal has caused to be shut up, and you wish to get her out of the hands of the cardinal. That's a match you are playing with his Eminence; this letter is your game. Why should you expose your game to your adversary? That is never done. Let him find it out if he can! We can find out his!"

"Well, that's all very sensible, Athos," said D'Artagnan.

"In that case, let there be no more question of what's past, and let Aramis resume the letter from his cousin where the cardinal interrupted him."

Aramis drew the letter from his pocket; the three friends

surrounded him, and the three lackeys grouped themselves again near the wine-jar.

"You had only read a line or two," said D'Artagnan ; "read the letter again from the commencement."

"Willingly," said Aramis.

MY DEAR COUSIN, — I think I shall make up my mind to set out for Béthune, where my sister has placed our little servant in the convent of the Carmelites ; this poor child is quite resigned, as she knows she cannot live elsewhere without the salvation of her soul being in danger. Nevertheless, if the affairs of our family are arranged, as we hope they will be, I believe she will run the risk of being damned, and will return to those she regrets, particularly as she knows they are always thinking of her. Meanwhile, she is not very wretched ; what she most desires is a letter from her intended. I know that such viands pass with difficulty through convent gratings ; but after all, as I have given you proofs, my dear cousin, I am not unskilled in such affairs, and I will take charge of the commission. My sister thanks you for your good and eternal remembrance. She has experienced much anxiety ; but she is now at length a little re-assured, having sent her secretary away in order that nothing may happen unexpectedly.

Adieu, my dear cousin. Tell us news of yourself as often as you can ; that is to say, as often as you can with safety. I embrace you.

MARIE MICHON.

"Oh, what do I not owe you, Aramis?" said D'Artagnan. "Dear Constance ! I have at length, then, intelligence of you. She lives ; she is in safety in a convent ; she is at Béthune ! Where is Béthune, Athos?"

"Why, upon the frontiers of Artois and of Flanders. The siege once over, we shall be able to make a tour in that direction."

"And that will not be long, it is to be hoped," said Porthos ; "for they have this morning hung a spy who

confessed that the Rochellais were reduced to the leather of their shoes. Supposing that after having eaten the leather they eat the soles, I cannot see much that is left unless they eat one another."

"Poor fools!" said Athos, emptying a glass of excellent Bordeaux wine which, without having at that period the reputation it now enjoys, merited it no less, — "poor fools! As if the Catholic religion was not the most advantageous and the most agreeable of all religions! All the same," resumed he, after having clicked his tongue against his palate, "they are brave fellows! But what the devil are you about, Aramis?" continued Athos. "Why, you are squeezing that letter into your pocket!"

"Yes," said D'Artagnan, "Athos is right, it must be burned. And yet if we burn it, who knows whether Monsieur Cardinal has not a secret to interrogate ashes?"

"He must have one," said Athos.

"What will you do with the letter, then?" asked Porthos.

"Come here, Grimaud," said Athos. Grimaud rose and obeyed. "As a punishment for having spoken without permission, my friend, you will please to eat this piece of paper; then to recompense you for the service you will have rendered us, you shall afterwards drink this glass of wine. First, here is the letter. Eat heartily."

Grimaud smiled; and with his eyes fixed upon the glass which Athos held in his hand, he ground the paper well between his teeth and then swallowed it.

"Bravo, M. Grimaud!" said Athos; "and now take this. That's well. We dispense with your saying grace."

Grimaud silently swallowed the glass of Bordeaux wine; but his eyes, raised towards heaven during this delicious occupation, spoke a language which, though mute, was not the less expressive.

"And now," said Athos, "unless Monsieur Cardinal should form the ingenious idea of ripping up Grimaud, I think we may be pretty much at our ease respecting the letter."

Meantime, his Eminence continued his melancholy ride, murmuring between his mustaches, "These four men must positively be mine."

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FIRST DAY OF CAPTIVITY.

LET us return to Milady, whom a glance thrown upon the coast of France has made us lose sight of for an instant.

We shall find her still in the despairing attitude in which we left her, plunged in an abyss of dismal reflections, — a dark hell at the gate of which she has almost left hope behind, because for the first time she doubts, for the first time she fears.

On two occasions her fortune has failed her, on two occasions she has found herself discovered and betrayed ; and on these two occasions it was to one fatal genius, sent doubtlessly by the Lord to combat her, that she has succumbed. D'Artagnan has conquered her, — her, that invincible power of evil.

He has deceived her in her love, humbled her in her pride, thwarted her in her ambition ; and now he ruins her fortune, deprives her of liberty, and even threatens her life. Still more, he has lifted the corner of her mask, — that shield with which she covered herself and which rendered her so strong.

D'Artagnan has turned aside from Buckingham, whom she hates as she hates every one she has loved, the tempest with which Richelieu threatened him in the person of the queen. D'Artagnan had passed himself upon her as De Wardes, for whom she had conceived one of those tiger-like fancies common to women of her character. D'Artagnan knows that terrible secret which she has sworn no

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one shall know without dying. In short, at the moment in which she has just obtained from Richelieu a *carte blanche* by the means of which she is about to take vengeance on her enemy, this precious paper is torn from her hands, and it is D'Artagnan who holds her prisoner and is about to send her to some filthy Botany Bay, some infamous Tyburn of the Indian Ocean.

All this she owes to D'Artagnan, without doubt. From whom can come so many disgraces heaped upon her head, if not from him? He alone could have transmitted to Lord de Winter all these frightful secrets which he has discovered, one after another, by a train of fatalities. He knows her brother-in-law. He must have written to him.

What hatred she distils! Motionless, with her burning and fixed glances, in her solitary apartment, how well the outbursts of passion which at times escape from the depths of her chest with her respiration, accompany the sound of the surge which rises, growls, roars, and breaks itself like an eternal and powerless despair against the rocks on which is built this dark and lofty castle! How many magnificent projects of vengeance she conceives by the light of the flashes which her tempestuous passion casts over her mind against Madame Bonacieux, against Buckingham, but above all against D'Artagnan, — projects lost in the distance of the future.

Yes; but in order to avenge herself she must be free. And to be free, a prisoner has to pierce a wall, detach bars, cut through a floor, — all undertakings which a patient and strong man may accomplish, but before which the feverish irritations of a woman must give way. Besides, to do all this, time is necessary, — months, years; and she has ten or twelve days, as Lord de Winter, her fraternal and terrible jailer, has told her.

And yet, if she were a man she would attempt all this,

and perhaps might succeed ; why, then, did Heaven make the mistake of placing that manlike soul in that frail and delicate body ?

The first moments of her captivity were terrible ; a few convulsions of rage which she could not suppress paid her debt of feminine weakness to nature. But by degrees she overcame the outbursts of her mad passion ; the nervous tremblings which agitated her frame disappeared, and she remained folded within herself like a fatigued serpent in repose.

“ Go to, go to ! I must have been mad to allow myself to be carried away so,” says she, gazing into the glass, which reflects back to her eyes the burning glance by which she appears to interrogate herself. “ No violence ; violence is the proof of weakness. In the first place, I have never succeeded by that means. Perhaps if I employed my strength against women I might perchance find them weaker than myself, and consequently conquer them ; but it is with men that I struggle, and I am but a woman to them. Let me fight like a woman, then ; my strength is in my weakness.”

Then, as if to render an account to herself of the changes she could place upon her countenance, so mobile and so expressive, she made it take all expressions from that of passionate anger, which convulsed her features, to that of the most sweet, most affectionate, and most seducing smile. Then her hair assumed successively, under her skilful hands, all the undulations she thought might assist the charms of her face. At length she murmured, satisfied with herself, “ Come, nothing is lost ; I am still beautiful.”

It was then nearly eight o'clock in the evening. Milady perceived a bed ; she calculated that the repose of a few hours would not only refresh her head and her ideas, but

still further, her complexion. A better idea, however, came into her mind before going to bed. She had heard something said about supper. She had already been an hour in this apartment; they could not long delay bringing her a repast. The prisoner did not wish to lose time; and she resolved to make that very evening some attempts to ascertain the nature of the ground she had to work upon, by studying the characters of the men to whose guardianship she was committed.

A light appeared under the door; this light announced the re-appearance of her jailers. Milady, who had arisen, threw herself quickly into the armchair, her head thrown back, her beautiful hair unbound and dishevelled, her bosom half bare beneath her crumpled lace, one hand on her heart, and the other hanging down.

The bolts were drawn; the door groaned upon its hinges. Steps sounded in the chamber, and drew near.

"Place that table there," said a voice which the prisoner recognized as that of Felton.

The order was executed.

"You will bring lights, and relieve the sentinel," continued Felton.

And this double order which the young lieutenant gave to the same individuals proved to Milady that her servants were the same men as her guards; that is to say, soldiers.

Felton's orders were, for the rest, executed with a silent rapidity that gave a good idea of the way in which he maintained discipline.

At length Felton, who had not yet looked at Milady, turned towards her.

"Ah, ah!" said he, "she is asleep; that's well. When she wakes she can sup." And he made some steps towards the door.

"But, my lieutenant," said a soldier, less stoical than his chief, and who had approached Milady, "this woman is not asleep."

"What, not asleep!" said Felton; "what is she doing, then?"

"She has fainted. Her face is very pale, and I have listened in vain; I do not hear her breathe."

"You are right," said Felton, after having looked at Milady from the spot on which he stood without moving a step towards her. "Go and tell Lord de Winter that his prisoner has fainted, — for this event not having been foreseen, I don't know what to do."

The soldier went out to obey the orders of his officer. Felton sat down upon an armchair which happened to be near the door, and waited without speaking a word, without making a gesture. Milady possessed that great art, so much studied by women, of looking through her long eyelashes without appearing to open the lids. She perceived Felton, who sat with his back towards her. She continued to look at him for nearly ten minutes, and in these ten minutes the immovable guardian never turned round once.

She then thought that Lord de Winter would come, and by his presence give fresh strength to her jailer. Her first trial was lost; she acted like a woman who reckons up her resources. As a result she raised her head, opened her eyes, and sighed deeply.

At this sigh Felton turned round.

"Ah, you are awake, Madame," he said; "then I have nothing more to do here. If you want anything you can ring."

"Oh, my God, my God! how I have suffered!" said Milady, in that harmonious voice which, like that of the ancient enchantresses, charmed all whom she wished to destroy.

And she assumed, upon sitting up in the armchair, a still more graceful and abandoned position than when she reclined.

Felton arose.

"You will be served, thus, Madame, three times a day," said he. "In the morning at nine o'clock, in the day at one o'clock, and in the evening at eight. If that does not suit you, you can point out what other hours you prefer, and in this respect your wishes will be complied with."

"But am I to remain always alone in this vast and dismal chamber?" asked Milady.

"A woman of the neighborhood has been sent for, who will be to-morrow at the castle, and will return as often as you desire her presence."

"I thank you, sir," replied the prisoner, humbly.

Felton made a slight bow, and directed his steps towards the door. At the moment he was about to go out, Lord de Winter appeared in the corridor, followed by the soldier who had been sent to inform him of the swoon of Milady. He held a vial of salts in his hand.

"Well, what is it, — what is going on here?" said he, in a jeering voice, on seeing the prisoner sitting up, and Felton about to go out. "Is this corpse come to life already? Felton, my lad, did you not perceive that you were taken for a novice, and that the first act was being performed of a comedy of which we shall doubtless have the pleasure of following out all the developments?"

"I thought so, my Lord," said Felton; "but as the prisoner is a woman, after all, I wish to pay her the attention that every man of gentle birth owes to a woman, if not on her account, at least on my own."

Milady shuddered through her whole system. These words of Felton's passed like ice through her veins.

"So," replied De Winter, laughing, "that beautiful

hair so skilfully dishevelled, that white skin, and that languishing look, have not yet seduced you, you heart of stone?"

"No, my Lord," replied the impassible young man; "your Lordship may be assured that it requires more than the tricks and coquetry of a woman to corrupt me."

"In that case, my brave lieutenant, let us leave Milady to find out something else, and go to supper; but be easy! She has a fruitful imagination, and the second act of the comedy will not delay its steps after the first."

And at these words Lord de Winter passed his arm through that of Felton, and led him out, laughing.

"Oh, I will be a match for you!" murmured Milady, between her teeth; "be assured of that, you poor spoiled monk, you poor converted soldier, who has cut his uniform out of a monk's frock!"

"By the way," resumed De Winter, stopping at the threshold of the door, "you must not, Milady, let this check take away your appetite. Taste that fowl and those fish. On my honor, they are not poisoned. I have a very good cook, and he is not to be my heir; I have full and perfect confidence in him. Do as I do. Adieu, dear sister, till your next swoon!"

This was all that Milady could endure. Her hands clutched her armchair; she ground her teeth inwardly; her eyes followed the motion of the door as it closed behind Lord de Winter and Felton, and the moment she was alone a fresh fit of despair seized her. She cast her eyes upon the table, saw the glittering of a knife, rushed towards it and clutched it; but her disappointment was cruel. The blade was round, and of flexible silver.

A burst of laughter resounded from the other side of the ill-closed door, and the door re-opened.

"Ha, ha!" cried Lord de Winter; "ha, ha! Don't

you see, my brave Felton ; don't you see what I told you ? That knife was for you, my lad ; she would have killed you. Observe, this is one of her peculiarities, to get rid thus, after one fashion or another, of all the people who bother her. If I had listened to you, the knife would have been pointed and of steel. Then no more of Felton ; she would have cut your throat, and after that everybody else's. See, John, see how well she knows how to handle a knife."

In fact, Milady still held the harmless weapon in her clenched hand ; but these last words, this supreme insult, relaxed her hands, her strength, and even her will. The knife fell to the ground.

"You were right, my Lord," said Felton, with a tone of profound disgust which sounded to the very bottom of the heart of Milady, — "you were right, my Lord, and I was wrong."

And both again left the room.

But this time Milady lent a more attentive ear than the first, and she heard their steps die away in the distance of the corridor.

"I am lost," murmured she ; "I am lost ! I am in the power of men upon whom I can have no more influence than upon statues of bronze or granite ; they know me by heart, and are steeled against all my weapons. It is, however, impossible that this should end as they have decreed !"

In fact, as this last reflection indicated, — this instinctive return to hope, — sentiments of weakness or fear did not dwell long in her ardent spirit. Milady sat down to table, ate from several dishes, drank a little Spanish wine, and felt all her resolution return.

Before she went to bed she had pondered, analyzed, turned on all sides, examined on all points, the words,

the steps, the gestures, the signs, and even the silence of her interlocutors; and of this profound, skilful, and anxious study the result was that Felton, everything considered, appeared the more vulnerable of her two persecutors.

One expression above all recurred to the mind of the prisoner: "If I had listened to you," Lord de Winter had said to Felton.

Felton then had spoken in her favor, since Lord de Winter had not been willing to listen to him.

"Weak or strong," repeated Milady, "that man has, then, a spark of pity in his soul; of that spark I will make a flame that shall devour him. As to the other, he knows me, he fears me, and knows what he has to expect of me if ever I escape from his hands. It is useless, then, to attempt anything with him. But Felton — that's another thing. He is a young, ingenuous, pure man who seems virtuous; him there are means of destroying."

And Milady went to bed and fell asleep with a smile upon her lips. Any one who had seen her sleeping might have said she was a young girl dreaming of the crown of flowers she was to wear on her brow at the next festival.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SECOND DAY OF CAPTIVITY.

MILADY dreamed that she at length had D'Artagnan in her power, that she was present at his execution ; and it was the sight of his odious blood, flowing beneath the axe of the headsman, which spread that charming smile upon her lips.

She slept as a prisoner sleeps, rocked by his first hope.

In the morning, when they entered her chamber she was still in bed. Felton remained in the corridor. He brought with him the woman of whom he had spoken the evening before, and who had just arrived ; this woman entered, and approaching Milady's bed, offered her services.

Milady was habitually pale ; her complexion might therefore deceive a person who saw her for the first time.

" I am in a fever," said she ; " I have not slept a single instant during all this long night. I suffer horribly. Are you likely to be more humane to me than others were yesterday ? All I ask is permission to remain abed."

" Would you like to have a physician called ?" said the woman.

Felton listened to this dialogue without speaking a word.

Milady reflected that the more people she had around her the more she would have to work upon, and Lord de Winter would redouble his watch. Besides, the physician might declare the ailment feigned ; and Milady, after

having lost the first trick, was not willing to lose the second.

"Go and fetch a physician?" said she. "What could be the good of that? These gentlemen declared yesterday that my illness was a comedy; it would be just the same to-day, no doubt, — for since yesterday evening they have had plenty of time to send for a doctor."

"Then," said Felton, who became impatient, "say yourself, Madame, what treatment you wish followed."

"Eh, how can I tell? My God! I know that I suffer, that's all. Give me anything you like, it is of little consequence."

"Go and fetch Lord de Winter," said Felton, tired of these eternal complaints.

"Oh, no, no!" cried Milady; "no, sir, do not call him, I conjure you. I am well, I want nothing; do not call him."

She gave so much vehemence, such magnetic eloquence to this exclamation, that Felton in spite of himself advanced some steps into the room.

"He is come!" thought Milady.

"Meanwhile, Madame, if you really suffer," said Felton, "a physician shall be sent for; and if you deceive us — well, it will be the worse for you. But at least we shall not have to reproach ourselves with anything."

Milady made no reply, but turning her beautiful head round upon her pillow, she burst into tears, and uttered heart-breaking sobs.

Felton surveyed her for an instant with his usual impassibility; then, seeing that the crisis threatened to be prolonged, he went out. The woman followed him, and Lord de Winter did not appear.

"I fancy I begin to see my way," murmured Milady, with a savage joy, burying herself under the clothes to

conceal from anybody who might be watching her this burst of inward satisfaction.

Two hours passed away.

"Now it is time that the malady should be over," said she ; "let me rise, and obtain some success this very day. I have but ten days, and this evening two of them will be gone."

In the morning, when they entered Milady's chamber they had brought her breakfast. Now she thought they could not long delay coming to clear the table, and that Felton would then re-appear.

Milady was not deceived. Felton re-appeared, and without observing whether Milady had or had not touched her repast, made a sign that the table should be carried out of the room, it having been brought in ready spread.

Felton remained behind ; he held a book in his hand.

Milady, reclining in an armchair near the chimney, beautiful, pale, and resigned, looked like a holy virgin awaiting martyrdom.

Felton approached her, and said, "Lord de Winter, who is a Catholic, like yourself, Madame, thinking that the deprivation of the rites and ceremonies of your church might be painful to you, has consented that you should read every day the ordinary of your Mass ; and here is a book which contains the ritual."

At the manner in which Felton laid the book upon the little table near which Milady was sitting, at the tone in which he pronounced the two words, *your Mass*, at the disdainful smile with which he accompanied them, Milady raised her head, and looked more attentively at the officer.

By that plain arrangement of the hair, by that costume of extreme simplicity, by the brow polished like marble and as hard and impenetrable, she recognized one of those

gloomy Puritans she had so often met, not only in the court of King James, but in that of the King of France, where, in spite of the remembrance of the St. Bartholomew, they sometimes came to seek refuge.

She then had one of those sudden inspirations which only people of genius receive in great crises, in supreme moments which are to decide their fortunes or their lives.

Those two words, *your Mass*, and a simple glance cast upon Felton, revealed to her all the importance of the reply she was about to make ; but with that rapidity of intelligence which was peculiar to her, this reply, ready arranged, presented itself to her lips : —

“ I ? ” said she, with an accent of disdain in unison with that which she had remarked in the voice of the young officer, — “ I, sir ? *My Mass* ? Lord de Winter, the corrupted Catholic, knows very well that I am not of his religion, and this is a snare he wishes to lay for me ! ”

“ And of what religion are you, then, Madame ? ” asked Felton, with an astonishment which in spite of the empire he held over himself he could not entirely conceal.

“ I will tell it,” cried Milady, with a feigned exultation, “ on the day when I shall have suffered sufficiently for my faith.”

The look of Felton revealed to Milady the full extent of the space she had opened for herself by this single word.

The young officer, however, remained mute and motionless ; his look alone had spoken.

“ I am in the hands of my enemies,” continued she, with that tone of enthusiasm which she knew was familiar to the Puritans. “ Well, let my God save me, or let me perish for my God ! That is the reply I beg you to make to Lord de Winter. And as to this book,” added she, pointing to the manual with her finger, but without touch-

ing it, as if she must be contaminated by it, "you may carry it back and make use of it yourself, for doubtless you are doubly the accomplice of Lord de Winter, — the accomplice in his persecutions, the accomplice in his heresies."

Felton made no reply, took the book with the same appearance of repugnance which he had before manifested, and retired pensively.

Lord de Winter came towards five o'clock in the evening. Milady had had time, during the whole day, to trace her plan of conduct. She received him like a woman who had already recovered all her advantages.

"It appears," said the baron, seating himself in the armchair opposite that occupied by Milady, and stretching out his legs carelessly upon the hearth, — "it appears we have made a little apostasy!"

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean to say that since we last met you have changed your religion. You have not, by chance, married a Protestant for a third husband, have you?"

"Explain yourself, my Lord," replied the prisoner, with majesty; "for though I hear your words, I declare I do not understand them."

"Then you have no religion at all; I like that best," replied Lord de Winter, laughing.

"Certainly that is most accordant with your own principles," replied Milady, frigidly.

"Oh, I confess it is all the same to me."

"Oh, you need not avow this religious indifference, my Lord; your debaucheries and crimes would vouch for it."

"What, you talk of debaucheries, Madame Messalina, Lady Macbeth! Either I misunderstand you, or you are very shameless!"

"You only speak thus because you are overheard," coolly replied Milady; "and you wish to interest your jailers and your hangmen against me."

"My jailers and my hangmen! Heyday, Madame! you are taking a poetical tone, and the comedy of yesterday turns to a tragedy this evening. As to the rest, in eight days you will be where you ought to be, and my task will be completed."

"Infamous task! impious task!" cried Milady, with the exultation of a victim who provokes his judge.

"My word," said De Winter, rising, "I think the hussy is going mad! Come, come, calm yourself, Madame Puritan, or I'll remove you to a dungeon. It's my Spanish wine that has got into your head, is it not? But never mind; that sort of intoxication is not dangerous, and will have no bad effects."

And Lord de Winter retired swearing, which at that period was a very knightly habit.

Felton was indeed behind the door, and had not lost one word of this scene. Milady had guessed aright.

"Yes, go, go!" said she to her brother; "the effects *are* drawing near, on the contrary; but you, weak fool, will not see them until it is too late to shun them."

Silence was re-established. Two hours passed away. Milady's supper was brought in, and she was found deeply engaged in saying her prayers aloud, — prayers which she had learned of an old servant of her second husband, a most austere Puritan. She appeared to be in ecstasy, and did not pay the least attention to what was going on around her. Felton made a sign that she should not be disturbed; and when all was arranged, he went out quietly with the soldiers.

Milady knew she might be watched, so she continued her prayers to the end; and it appeared to her that the

soldier who was on duty at her door did not march with the same step, and seemed to listen. For the moment she wished nothing better. She arose, came to the table, ate but little, and drank only water.

An hour after, her table was cleared; but Milady remarked that this time Felton did not accompany the soldiers. He feared, then, to see her too often.

She turned towards the wall to smile, — for there was in this smile such an expression of triumph that this smile alone would have betrayed her.

She allowed, therefore, half-an-hour to pass away; and as at that moment all was silence in the old castle, as nothing was heard but the eternal murmur of the waves, — that immense breaking of the ocean, — with her pure, harmonious, and powerful voice, she began the first couplet of the psalm then in great favor with the Puritans:

“Thou leavest thy servants, Lord,
To see if they be strong;
But soon thou dost afford
Thy hand to lead them on.”

These verses were not excellent, — very far from it; but as it is well known, the Puritans did not pique themselves upon their poetry.

While singing, Milady listened. The soldier on guard at her door stopped, as if he had been changed into stone. Milady was then able to judge of the effect she had produced.

Then she continued her singing with inexpressible fervor and feeling. It appeared to her that the sounds spread to a distance beneath the vaulted roofs, and carried with them a magic charm to soften the hearts of her jailers. It however likewise appeared that the soldier on duty — a zealous Catholic no doubt — shook off the charm,

for through the door he called: "Hold your tongue, Madame! Your song is as dismal as a 'De profundis;' and if besides the pleasure of being in garrison here, we must hear such things as these, no mortal can hold out."

"Silence!" then exclaimed another stern voice which Milady recognized as that of Felton. "What are you meddling with, stupid? Did anybody order you to prevent that woman from singing? No. You were told to guard her, — to fire at her if she attempted to fly. Guard her! If she flies, kill her; but don't exceed your orders."

An expression of unspeakable joy lightened the countenance of Milady; but this expression was fleeting as the reflection of lightning. Without appearing to have heard the dialogue, of which she had not lost a word, she began again, giving to her voice all the charm, all the power, all the seduction the demon had bestowed upon it: —

"For all my tears, my cares,
My exile, and my chains,
I have my youth, my prayers,
And God, who counts my pains.

Her voice, of immense power and sublime expression, gave to the rude, unpolished poetry of these psalms a magic and an effect which the most exalted Puritans rarely found in the songs of their brethren, and which they were forced to ornament with all the resources of their imagination. Felton believed he heard the singing of the angel who consoled the three Hebrews in the furnace.

Milady continued: —

"One day our doors will ope,
With God come our desire;
And if betrays that hope,
To death we can aspire."

This verse, into which the terrible enchantress threw her whole soul, completed the trouble which had seized the heart of the young officer. He opened the door quickly ; and Milady saw him appear, pale as usual, but with his eyes inflamed and almost wild.

"Why do you sing thus, and with such a voice?" said he.

"Your pardon, sir," said Milady, with mildness. "I forgot that my songs are out of place in this castle. I have perhaps offended you in your creed ; but it was without wishing to do so, I swear. Pardon me, then, a fault which is perhaps great, but which certainly was involuntary."

Milady was so beautiful at this moment, the religious ecstasy in which she appeared to be plunged gave such an expression to her countenance, that Felton was so dazzled that he fancied he beheld the angel whom he had only just before heard.

"Yes, yes," said he ; "you disturb, you agitate the people who live in the castle."

The poor senseless young man was not aware of the incoherence of his words, while Milady was reading with her lynx's eyes the very depths of his heart.

"I will be silent, then," said Milady, casting down her eyes with all the sweetness she could give to her voice, with all the resignation she could impress upon her manner.

"No, no, Madame," said Felton, "only do not sing so loud, particularly at night."

And at these words Felton, feeling that he could not long maintain his severity towards his prisoner, rushed out of the room.

"You have done right, Lieutenant," said the soldier. "Such songs disturb the mind ; and yet we become accustomed to them, her voice is so beautiful."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE THIRD DAY OF CAPTIVITY.

FELTON had fallen ; but there was still another step to be taken. He must be retained, or rather he must be left quite alone ; and Milady but obscurely perceived the means which could lead to this result.

Still more must be done. He must be made to speak, in order that he might be spoken to, — for Milady very well knew that her greatest seduction was in her voice, which so skilfully ran over the whole gamut of tones from human speech to language celestial.

Yet in spite of all this seduction Milady might fail, — for Felton was forewarned, and that against the least chance. From that moment she watched all his actions, all his words, from the simplest glance of his eyes to his gestures, — even to a breath that could be interpreted as a sigh. In short, she studied everything, as a skilful comedian does to whom a new part has been assigned in a line to which he is not accustomed.

Face to face with Lord de Winter her plan of conduct was more easy. She had laid that down the preceding evening. To remain silent and dignified in his presence ; from time to time to irritate him by affected disdain, by a contemptuous word ; to provoke him to threats and violence which would produce a contrast with her own resignation, — such was her plan. Felton would see all ; perhaps he would say nothing, but he would see.

In the morning, Felton came as usual ; but Milady allowed him to preside over all the preparations for breakfast without addressing a word to him. At the moment when he was about to retire, she was cheered with a ray of hope, for she thought he was about to speak ; but his lips moved without any sound leaving his mouth, and making a powerful effort to control himself, he sent back to his heart the words that were about to escape from his lips, and went out.

Towards mid-day, Lord de Winter entered.

It was a tolerably fine winter's day, and a ray of that pale English sun which lightens but does not warm came through the bars of her prison.

Milady was looking out at the window, and pretended not to hear the door as it opened.

" Ah, ah ! " said Lord de Winter, " after having played comedy, after having played tragedy, we are now playing melancholy ? "

The prisoner made no reply.

" Yes, yes, " continued Lord de Winter, " I understand. You would like very well to be at liberty on that beach ! You would like very well to be in a good ship dancing upon the waves of that emerald-green sea ; you would like very well, either on land or on the ocean, to lay for me one of those nice little ambuscades you are so skilful in planning. Patience, patience ! In four days' time the shore will be beneath your foot, the sea will be open to you, — more open than will perhaps be agreeable to you, for in four days England will be relieved of you. "

Milady folded her hands, and raising her fine eyes towards heaven, " Lord, Lord, " said she, with an angelic meekness of gesture and tone, " pardon this man, as I myself pardon him. "

" Yes, pray, accursed woman ! " cried the baron ; " your

prayer is so much the more generous from your being, I swear to you, in the power of a man who will never pardon you!" And he went out.

At the moment he went out a piercing glance darted through the opening of the nearly closed door, and she perceived Felton, who drew quickly to one side to prevent being seen by her.

Then she threw herself upon her knees, and began to pray.

"My God, my God!" said she, "thou knowest in what holy cause I suffer; give me, then, strength to suffer."

The door opened gently; the beautiful suppliant pretended not to hear the noise, and in a voice broken by tears, she continued:—

"God of vengeance! God of goodness! wilt thou allow the frightful projects of this man to be accomplished?"

Then only she pretended to hear the sound of Felton's steps, and rising quick as thought, she blushed, as if ashamed of being surprised on her knees.

"I do not like to disturb those who pray, Madame," said Felton, seriously; "do not disturb yourself on my account, I beseech you."

"How do you know I was praying, sir?" said Milady, in a voice broken by sobs. "You were deceived, sir; I was not praying."

"Do you think, then, Madame," replied Felton, in the same serious voice, but with a milder tone, "do you think I assume the right of preventing a creature from prostrating herself before her Creator? God forbid! Besides, repentance becomes the guilty; whatever crimes they may have committed, for me the guilty are sacred at the feet of God!"

"Guilty? I?" said Milady, with a smile which might have disarmed the angel of the last judgment. "Guilty?"

Oh, my God, thou knowest whether I am guilty ! Say I am condemned, sir, if you please ; but you know that God, who loves martyrs, sometimes permits the innocent to be condemned."

"Were you condemned, were you innocent, were you a martyr," replied Felton, "the greater would be the necessity for prayer ; and I myself would aid you with my prayers."

"Oh, you are a just man !" cried Milady, throwing herself at his feet. "I can hold out no longer, for I fear I shall be wanting in strength at the moment when I shall be forced to undergo the struggle, and confess my faith. Listen, then, to the supplication of a despairing woman. You are abused, sir ; but that is not the question. I only ask you one favor ; and if you grant it me, I will bless you in this world and in the next."

"Speak to the master, Madame," said Felton ; "happily, I am neither charged with the power of pardoning nor punishing. It is upon one higher placed than I am that God has laid this responsibility."

"To you — no, to you alone ! Listen to me, rather than add to my destruction, rather than add to my ignominy !"

"If you have merited this shame, Madame, if you have incurred this ignominy, you must submit to it as an offering to God."

"What do you say ? Oh, you do not understand me ! When I speak of ignominy, you think I speak of some chastisement, of imprisonment or death. Would to Heaven ! Of what consequence to me is imprisonment or death ?"

"It is I who no longer understand you, Madame," said Felton.

"Or, rather, who pretend not to understand me, sir !" replied the prisoner, with a smile of incredulity.

"No, Madame, on the honor of a soldier, on the faith of a Christian."

"What, you are ignorant of Lord de Winter's designs upon me?"

"I am."

"Impossible; you are his confidant!"

"I never lie, Madame."

"Oh, he conceals them too little for you not to divine them."

"I seek to divine nothing, Madame; I wait till I am confided in, and apart from that which Lord de Winter has said to me before you, he has confided nothing to me."

"Why, then," cried Milady, with an incredible tone of truthfulness, "you are not his accomplice; you do not know that he destines me to a disgrace which all the punishments of the world cannot equal in horror?"

"You are deceived, Madame," said Felton, blushing; "Lord de Winter is not capable of such a crime."

"Good," said Milady to herself; "without knowing what it is, he calls it a crime!" Then aloud, "The friend of that wretch is capable of everything."

"Whom do you call *that wretch*?" asked Felton.

"Are there, then, in England two men to whom such an epithet can be applied?"

"You mean George Villiers?" said Felton, whose looks became excited.

"Whom Pagans and unbelieving Gentiles call Duke of Buckingham," replied Milady. "I could not have thought that there was an Englishman in all England who would have required so long an explanation to make him understand of whom I was speaking."

"The hand of the Lord is stretched over him," said Felton; "he will not escape the chastisement he deserves."

Felton only expressed, with regard to the duke, the

feeling of execration which all the English had declared towards him whom the Catholics themselves called the extortioner, the pillager, the debauchee, and whom the Puritans styled simply Satan.

"Oh, my God, my God!" cried Milady; "when I supplicate thee to pour upon this man the chastisement which is his due, thou knowest it is not my own vengeance I pursue, but the deliverance of a whole nation that I implore!"

"Do you know him, then?" asked Felton.

"At length he interrogates me!" said Milady to herself, at the height of joy at having obtained so quickly such a great result. "Oh, know him? Yes, yes! to my misfortune, to my eternal misfortune!" and Milady twisted her arms as if in a paroxysm of grief.

Felton no doubt felt within himself that his strength was abandoning him, and he made several steps towards the door; but the prisoner, whose eye never left him, sprang in pursuit of him and stopped him.

"Sir," cried she, "be kind, be clement, listen to my prayer! That knife, which the fatal prudence of the baron deprived me of, because he knows the use I would make of it! Oh, hear me to the end! that knife, give it to me for a minute only, for mercy's, for pity's sake! I will embrace your knees! You shall shut the door that you may be certain I contemplate no injury to you! My God! to you, — the only just, good, and compassionate being I have met with! To you, — my preserver, perhaps! One minute that knife, one minute, a single minute, and I will restore it to you through the grating of the door. Only one minute, Mr. Felton, and you will have saved my honor!"

"To kill yourself?" cried Felton, with terror, forgetting to withdraw his hands from the hands of the prisoner, — "to kill yourself?"

"I have told, sir," murmured Milady, lowering her voice, and allowing herself to sink overpowered to the ground; "I have told my secret! He knows all! My God, I am lost!"

Felton remained standing, motionless and undecided.

"He still doubts," thought Milady; "I have not been earnest enough."

Some one was heard in the corridor; Milady recognized the step of Lord de Winter.

Felton recognized it also, and made a step towards the door.

Milady sprang towards him. "Oh, not a word," said she, in a concentrated voice, "not a word of all that I have said to you to this man, or I am lost, and it would be you — you —"

Then as the steps drew near, she became silent for fear of being heard, applying, with a gesture of infinite terror, her beautiful hand to Felton's mouth.

Felton gently repulsed Milady, and she sank into a chair.

Lord de Winter passed before the door without stopping, and they heard the noise of his footsteps soon die away.

Felton, as pale as death, remained some instants with his ear bent and listening; then, when the sound was quite extinct, he breathed like a man awaking from a dream, and rushed out of the apartment.

"Ah!" said Milady, listening in her turn to the noise of Felton's steps, which withdrew in a direction opposite to those of Lord de Winter; "at length you are mine!"

Then her brow darkened. "If he tells the baron," said she, "I am lost, — for the baron, who knows very well that I shall not kill myself, will place me before him



Felton and Milady

with a knife in my hand, and he will discover that all this despair is but acted."

She placed herself before the glass, and regarded herself attentively ; never had she appeared more beautiful.

"Oh, yes," said she, smiling, "but he won't tell him!"

In the evening Lord de Winter accompanied the supper.

"Sir," said Milady, "is your presence an indispensable accessory of my captivity? Could you not spare me the increase of torture which your visits cause me?"

"How, dear sister!" said Lord de Winter. "Did not you sentimentally inform me with that pretty mouth of yours, so cruel to me to-day, that you came to England solely for the pleasure of seeing me at your ease, an enjoyment of which you told me you so sensibly felt the deprivation that you had risked everything for it, — seasickness, tempest, captivity? Well, here I am; be satisfied. Besides, this time, my visit has a motive."

Milady trembled; she thought Felton had told all. Perhaps never in her life had this woman, who had experienced so many opposite and powerful emotions, felt her heart beat so violently.

She was seated. Lord de Winter took a chair, drew it towards her, and sat down close beside her. Then taking a paper out of his pocket, he unfolded it slowly.

"Here," said he, "I want to show you the kind of passport which I have drawn up, and which will serve you henceforward as the rule of order in the life I consent to leave you."

Then turning his eyes from Milady to the paper, he read: "'Order to conduct ——' The name is blank," interrupted Lord de Winter. "If you have any preference you can point it out to me; and if it be not within a thousand leagues of London, attention will be paid to your wishes. I will begin again, then: —

“‘Order to conduct to — the person named Charlotte Backson, branded by the justice of the kingdom of France, but liberated after chastisement. She is to dwell in this place without ever going more than three leagues from it. In case of any attempt to escape, the penalty of death is to be applied. She will receive five shillings per day for lodging and food.’”

“That order does not concern me,” replied Milady, coldly, “since it bears another name than mine.”

“A name? Have you a name, then?”

“I bear that of your brother.”

“Ay, but you are mistaken. My brother is only your second husband; and your first is still living. Tell me his name, and I will put it in the place of the name of Charlotte Backson. No? You will not? You are silent? Well, then you must be registered as Charlotte Backson.”

Milady remained silent; only this time it was no longer from affectation, but from terror. She believed the order ready for execution. She thought that Lord de Winter had hastened her departure; she thought she was condemned to set off that very evening. Everything in her mind was lost for an instant; when all at once she perceived that no signature was attached to the order. The joy she felt at this discovery was so great she could not conceal it.

“Yes, yes,” said Lord de Winter, who perceived what was passing in her mind; “yes, you look for the signature, and you say to yourself: ‘All is not lost, for that order is not signed. It is only shown to me to terrify me, that’s all.’ You are mistaken. To-morrow this order will be sent to the Duke of Buckingham. The day after to-morrow it will return signed by his hand and marked with his seal; and four-and-twenty hours afterwards I will answer for its being carried into execution. Adieu, Madame. That is all I had to say to you.”

“And I reply to you, sir, that this abuse of power, this exile under a fictitious name, are infamous !”

“Would you like better to be hung in your true name, Milady ? You know that the English laws are inexorable on the abuse of marriage. Speak freely. Although my name, or rather that of my brother, would be mixed up with the affair, I will risk the scandal of a public trial to make myself certain of getting rid of you.”

Milady made no reply, but became as pale as a corpse.

“Oh, I see you prefer peregrination. That’s well, Madame ; and there is an old proverb that says, ‘Traveling trains youth.’ My faith ! you are not wrong after all, and life is sweet. That’s the reason why I take such care you shall not deprive me of mine. There only remains, then, the question of the five shillings to be settled. You think me rather parsimonious, don’t you ? That’s because I don’t care to leave you the means of corrupting your jailers. Besides, you will always have your charms left to seduce them with. Employ them, if your check with regard to Felton has not disgusted you with attempts of that kind.”

“Felton has not told him,” said Milady to herself. “Nothing is lost, then.”

“And now, Madame, till I see you again ! To-morrow I will come and announce to you the departure of my messenger.”

Lord de Winter rose, saluted her ironically, and went out

Milady breathed again. She had still four days before her. Four days would quite suffice to complete the seduction of Felton.

A terrible idea, however, rushed into her mind. She thought that Lord de Winter would perhaps send Felton himself to get the order signed by the Duke of Bucking-

ham. In that case Felton would escape her, — for in order to secure success, the magic of a continuous seduction was necessary. Nevertheless, as we have said, one circumstance re-assured her. Felton had not spoken.

As she would not appear to be agitated by the threats of Lord de Winter, she placed herself at the table and ate.

Then, as she had done the evening before, she fell on her knees and repeated her prayers aloud. As on the evening before, the soldier stopped his march to listen to her.

Soon after she heard lighter steps than those of the sentinel, which came from the end of the corridor and stopped before her door.

“It is he,” said she. And she began the same religious chant which had so strongly excited Felton the evening before.

But although her voice, — sweet, full, and sonorous, — vibrated as harmoniously and as affectingly as ever, the door remained shut. It appeared however to Milady that in one of the furtive glances she darted from time to time at the grating of the door she thought she saw the ardent eyes of the young man through the narrow opening. But whether this was reality or vision, he had this time sufficient self-command not to enter.

However, a few instants after she had finished her religious song, Milady thought she heard a profound sigh. Then the same steps she had heard approach slowly withdrew, and as if with regret.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FOURTH DAY OF CAPTIVITY.

THE next day, when Felton entered Milady's apartment he found her standing, mounted upon a chair, holding in her hands a cord made by means of torn cambric handkerchiefs, twisted into a kind of rope one with another, and tied at the ends. At the noise Felton made in entering, Milady leaped lightly to the ground, and tried to conceal behind her the improvised cord she held in her hand.

The young man was more pale than usual, and his eyes, reddened by want of sleep, denoted that he had passed a feverish night. Nevertheless, his brow was armed with a severity more austere than ever.

He advanced slowly towards Milady, who had seated herself, and taking an end of the murderous rope which by neglect, or perhaps by design, she allowed to be seen, "What is this, Madame?" he asked coldly.

"That? Nothing," said Milady, smiling with that painful expression which she knew so well how to give to her smile. "*Ennui* is the mortal enemy of prisoners; I had *ennui*, and I amused myself with twisting that rope."

Felton turned his eyes towards the part of the wall of the apartment before which he had found Milady standing in the armchair in which she was now seated, and over her head he perceived a gilt-headed screw, fixed in the wall for the purpose of hanging up clothes or weapons.

He started, and the prisoner saw that start, — for though her eyes were cast down, nothing escaped her.

“What were you doing on that armchair?” asked he.

“Of what consequence?” replied Milady.

“But,” replied Felton, “I wish to know.”

“Do not question me,” said the prisoner; “you know that we who are true Christians are forbidden to lie.”

“Well, then,” said Felton, “I will tell you what you were doing, or rather what you meant to do; you were going to complete the fatal project you cherish in your mind. Remember, Madame, if our God forbids falsehood, he much more severely condemns suicide.”

“When God sees one of his creatures persecuted unjustly, placed between suicide and dishonor, believe me, sir,” replied Milady, in a tone of deep conviction, “God pardons suicide, for then suicide becomes martyrdom.”

“You say either too much or too little; speak, Madame. In the name of Heaven, explain yourself.”

“That I may relate my misfortunes for you to treat them as fables; that I may tell you my projects for you to go and betray them to my persecutor? No, sir. Besides, of what importance to you is the life or death of a condemned wretch? You are only responsible for my body, is it not so? And provided you produce a carcass that may be recognized as mine, they will require no more of you; nay, perhaps you will even have a double reward.”

“I, Madame, I?” cried Felton. “You suppose that I would ever accept the price of your life? Oh, you cannot believe what you say!”

“Let me act as I please, Felton, let me act as I please,” said Milady, elated. “Every soldier must be ambitious, must he not? You are a lieutenant? Well, you will follow me to the grave with the rank of captain.”

"What have I, then, done to you," said Felton, much agitated, "that you should load me with such a responsibility before God and before men? In a few days you will be away from this place; your life, Madame, will then no longer be under my care, and," added he, with a sigh, "then you can do what you will with it."

"So," cried Milady, as if she could not resist giving utterance to a holy indignation, "you, a pious man, you who are called a just man, you ask but one thing — and that is that you may not be inculpated, annoyed, by my death!"

"It is my duty to watch over your life, Madame, and I will watch."

"But do you understand the mission you are fulfilling? Cruel enough, if I am guilty; but what name can you give it, what name will the Lord give it, if I am innocent?"

"I am a soldier, Madame, and fulfil the orders I have received."

"Do you believe, then, that at the day of the Last Judgment God will separate blind executioners from iniquitous judges? You are not willing that I should kill my body, and you make yourself the agent of him who would kill my soul."

"But I repeat it again to you," replied Felton, in great emotion, "no danger threatens you; I will answer for Lord de Winter as for myself."

"Dunce," cried Milady, — "dunce! who dares to answer for another man, when the wisest, when those most after God's own heart, hesitate to answer for themselves, and who ranges himself on the side of the strongest and the most fortunate, to crush the weakest and the most unfortunate."

"Impossible, Madame, impossible," murmured Felton,

who felt to the bottom of his heart the justness of this argument. "A prisoner, you will not recover your liberty through me ; living, you will not lose your life through me."

"Yes," cried Milady, "but I shall lose that which is much dearer to me than life, I shall lose my honor, Felton ; and it is you, you whom I make responsible, before God and before men, for my shame and my infamy."

This time Felton, immovable as he was, or appeared to be, could not resist the secret influence which had already taken possession of him. To see this woman, so beautiful, fair as the brightest vision, to see her by turns overcome with grief and threatening ; to resist at once the ascendancy of grief and beauty, — it was too much for a visionary ; it was too much for a brain weakened by the ardent dreams of an ecstatic faith ; it was too much for a heart furrowed by the love of heaven that burns, by the hatred of men that devours.

Milady saw the trouble. She felt by intuition the flame of the opposing passions which burned with the blood in the veins of the young fanatic. As a skilful general, seeing the enemy ready to surrender, marches towards him with a cry of victory, she rose, beautiful as an antique priestess, inspired like a Christian virgin, her arms extended, her throat uncovered, her hair dishevelled, holding with one hand her robe modestly drawn over her breast, her look illumined by that fire which had already created such disorder in the veins of the young Puritan, and went towards him, crying out with a vehement air, and in her melodious voice to which on this occasion she communicated a terrible energy :—

"Let his victim to Baal be sent,
To the lions the martyr be thrown !
Thy God shall teach thee to repent !
From th' abyss he'll give ear to my moan."

Felton stood before this strange apparition like one petrified.

"Who art thou? Who art thou?" cried he, clasping his hands. "Art thou a messenger from God; art thou a minister from hell; art thou an angel or a demon; callest thou thyself Eloa or Astarte?"

"Do you not know me, Felton? I am neither an angel nor a demon; I am a daughter of earth, I am a sister of thy faith, that is all."

"Yes, yes!" said Felton, "I doubted, but now I believe."

"You believe, and still you are an accomplice of that child of Belial who is called Lord de Winter! You believe, and yet you leave me in the hands of mine enemies, of the enemy of England, of the enemy of God! You believe, and yet you deliver me up to him who fills and defiles the world with his heresies and debaucheries, — to that infamous Sardanapalus whom the blind call the Duke of Buckingham, and whom believers name Antichrist!"

"I deliver you up to Buckingham? I? what mean you by that?"

"They have eyes," cried Milady, "but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not."

"Yes, yes!" said Felton, passing his hands over his brow, covered with sweat, as if to remove his last doubt. "Yes, I recognize the voice which speaks to me in my dreams; yes, I recognize the features of the angel who appears to me every night, crying to my soul, which cannot sleep: 'Strike, save England, save thyself, — for thou wilt die without having appeased God!' Speak, speak!" cried Felton, "I can understand you now."

A flash of terrible joy, but rapid as thought, gleamed from the eyes of Milady.

However fugitive this homicide flash, Felton saw it, and started as if its light had revealed the abysses of this

woman's heart. He recalled, all at once, the warnings of Lord de Winter, the seductions of Milady, her first attempts after her arrival. He drew back a step, and hung down his head, without, however, ceasing to look at her, as if, fascinated by this strange creature, he could not detach his eyes from her eyes.

Milady was not a woman to misunderstand the meaning of this hesitation. Under her apparent emotions her icy coolness never abandoned her. Before Felton replied, and before she should be forced to resume this conversation, so difficult to be sustained in the same exalted tone, she let her hands fall; and as if the weakness of the woman overpowered the enthusiasm of the inspired fanatic, she said: "But no, it is not for me to be the Judith to deliver Bethulia from this Holofernes. The sword of the eternal is too heavy for my arm. Allow me, then, to avoid dishonor by death; let me take refuge in martyrdom. I do not ask you for liberty, as a guilty one would, nor for vengeance, as would a Pagan. Let me die; that is all. I supplicate you, I implore you on my knees, — let me die, and my last sigh shall be a blessing for my preserver."

Hearing that voice, so sweet and suppliant, seeing that look, so timid and downcast, Felton reproached himself. By degrees the enchantress had clothed herself with that magic adornment which she assumed and threw aside at will; that is to say, beauty, meekness, and tears, — and above all, the irresistible attraction of mystical voluptuousness, the most devouring of all voluptuousness.

"Alas!" said Felton, "I can do but one thing, which is to pity you if you prove to me you are a victim! But Lord de Winter makes cruel accusations against you. You are a Christian; you are my sister in religion. I feel myself drawn towards you, — I, who have never loved any one but my benefactor, — I who have met with nothing but traitors

and impious men. But you, Madame, so beautiful in reality, you, so pure in appearance, must have committed great iniquities for Lord de Winter to pursue you thus."

"They have eyes," repeated Milady, with an accent of indescribable grief, "but they see not; ears have they, but they hear not."

"But," cried the young officer, "speak, then, speak!"

"Confide my shame to you," cried Milady, with the blush of modesty upon her countenance, — "for often the crime of one becomes the shame of another, — confide my shame to you, a man, and I a woman? Oh," continued she, placing her hand modestly over her beautiful eyes, "never! never! — I could not!"

"To me, to a brother?" said Felton.

Milady looked at him for some time with an expression which the young man took for doubt, but which, however, was nothing but observation, or rather the wish to fascinate.

Felton, in his turn a suppliant, clasped his hands.

"Well, then," said Milady, "I confide in my brother; I will dare to —"

At this moment the steps of Lord de Winter were heard; but this time the terrible brother-in-law of Milady did not content himself, as on the preceding day, with passing before the door and going away again. He paused, exchanged two words with the sentinel; then the door opened, and he appeared.

During the exchange of these two words Felton drew back quickly, and when Lord de Winter entered, he was several paces from the prisoner.

The baron entered slowly, sending a scrutinizing glance from Milady to the young officer.

"You have been here a very long time, John," said he. "Has this woman been relating her crimes to

you? In that case I can comprehend the length of the conversation."

Felton started; and Milady felt she was lost if she did not come to the assistance of the disconcerted Puritan.

"Ah, you fear your prisoner should escape!" said she. "Well, ask your worthy jailer what favor I this instant solicited of him."

"You demanded a favor?" said the baron, suspiciously.

"Yes, my Lord," replied the young man, confused.

"And what favor, pray?" asked Lord de Winter.

"A knife, which she would return to me through the grating of the door a minute after she had received it," replied Felton.

"There is some one, then, concealed here whose throat this amiable lady is desirous of cutting," said De Winter, in an ironical, contemptuous tone.

"There is myself," replied Milady.

"I have given you the choice between America and Tyburn," replied Lord de Winter. "Choose Tyburn, Madame. Believe me, the cord is more certain than the knife."

Felton grew pale, and made a step forward, remembering that at the moment he entered Milady had a rope in her hand.

"You are right," said she, "I have often thought of it." Then she added in a low voice, "And I will think of it again."

Felton felt a shudder run to the marrow of his bones; probably Lord de Winter perceived this emotion.

"Mistrust yourself, John," said he. "I have placed reliance upon you, my friend. Beware! I have warned you! But be of good courage, my lad; in three days we shall be delivered from this creature, and where I shall send her she can harm nobody."

THE FOURTH DAY OF CAPTIVITY.

"You hear him!" cried Milady, with vehemence, so that the baron might believe she was addressing Heaven, and that Felton might understand she was addressing him.

Felton lowered his head and reflected.

The baron took the young officer by the arm, and turned his head over his shoulder, so as not to lose sight of Milady till he was gone out.

"Well," said the prisoner, when the door was shut, "I am not so far advanced as I believed. De Winter has changed his usual stupidity into a strange prudence. It is the desire of vengeance, and how desire moulds a man! As to Felton, he hesitates. Ah, he is not a man like that cursed D'Artagnan. A Puritan only adores virgins, and he adores them by clasping his hands. A musketeer loves women, and he loves them by clasping his arms."

Milady waited, then, with much impatience, for she feared the day would pass away without her seeing Felton again. At last, in an hour after the scene we have just described, she heard some one speaking in a low voice at the door. Presently the door opened, and she perceived Felton.

The young man advanced rapidly into the chamber, leaving the door open behind him, and making a sign to Milady to be silent; his face was much agitated.

"What do you want with me?" said she.

"Listen," replied Felton, in a low voice. "I have just sent away the sentinel that I might remain here without anybody knowing it, in order to speak to you without being overheard. The baron has just related a frightful history to me."

Milady assumed her smile of a resigned victim, and shook her head.

"Either you are a demon," continued Felton, "or the

baron — my benefactor, my father — is a monster. I have known you four days ; I have loved him four years. I therefore may hesitate between you. Be not alarmed at what I say ; I want to be convinced. To-night, after twelve, I will come and see you, and you shall convince me."

"No, Felton, no, my brother," said she ; "the sacrifice is too great, and I feel what it must cost you. No, I am lost ; do not be lost with me. My death will be much more eloquent than my life, and the silence of the corpse will convince you much better than the words of the prisoner."

"Be silent, Madame," cried Felton, "and do not speak to me thus ; I came to entreat you to promise me upon your honor, to swear to me by what you hold most sacred, that you will make no attempt upon your life."

"I will not promise," said Milady, "for no one has more respect for a promise or an oath than I have ; and if I make a promise I must keep it."

"Well," said Felton, "only promise till you have seen me again. If, when you have seen me again, you still persist — well, then you shall be free, and I myself will give you the weapon you desire."

"Well," said Milady, "for you I will wait."

"Swear."

"I swear it, by our God. Are you satisfied ?"

"Well," said Felton, "till to-night."

And he darted out of the room, shut the door, and waited in the corridor, the soldier's half-pike in his hand, and as if he had mounted guard in his place.

The soldier returned, and Felton gave him back his weapon.

Then, through the grating to which she had drawn near, Milady saw the young man make a sign with

delirious fervor, and depart in an apparent transport of joy.

As for her, she returned to her place with a smile of savage contempt upon her lips, and repeated, blaspheming, that terrible name of God, by whom she had just sworn without ever having learned to know him.

“My God,” said she, “what a senseless fanatic! My God, it is I, — I, — and this fellow who will help me to avenge myself.”

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE FIFTH DAY OF CAPTIVITY.

MILADY had however achieved a half-triumph, and success doubled her forces.

It was not difficult to conquer, as she had hitherto done, men prompt to let themselves be seduced, and whom the gallant education of a court led quickly into her net. Milady was handsome enough not to find much resistance on the part of the flesh, and she was sufficiently skilful to prevail over all the obstacles of the mind.

But this time she had to contend with an unpolished nature, concentrated and insensible by force of austerity. Religion and its observances had made Felton a man inaccessible to ordinary seductions. There fermented in that sublimated brain plans so vast, projects so tumultuous, that there remained no room for any capricious or material love, — that sentiment which is fed by leisure and grows with corruption. Milady had then made a breach by her false virtue in the opinion of a man horribly prejudiced against her, and by her beauty in the heart of a man hitherto chaste and pure. In short, she had taken the measure of motives hitherto unknown to herself, through this experiment, made upon the most rebellious subject that nature and religion could submit to her study.

Many a time, nevertheless, during the evening she despaired of fate and of herself. She did not invoke God, we very well know, but she had faith in the genius of

evil, — that immense sovereignty which reigns in all the details of human life, and by which, as in the Arabian fable, a single pomegranate seed is sufficient to re-construct a ruined world.

Milady, being well prepared for the reception of Felton, was able to erect her batteries for the next day. She knew she had only two days left ; that when once the order was signed by Buckingham — and Buckingham would sign it the more readily from its bearing a false name, and he could not, therefore, recognize the woman in question — once this order signed, we say, the baron would make her embark immediately, and she knew very well that women condemned to exile employ arms much less powerful in their seductions than the pretendedly virtuous woman whose beauty is enlightened by the sun of the world, whose style the voice of fashion lauds, and whom a halo of aristocracy gilds with enchanting splendors. To be a woman condemned to a painful and disgraceful punishment is no impediment to beauty, but it is an obstacle to the recovery of power. Like all persons of real genius, Milady knew what suited her nature and her means. Poverty was repugnant to her ; degradation took away two-thirds of her greatness. Milady was only a queen while among queens. The pleasure of satisfied pride was necessary to her domination. To command inferior beings was rather a humiliation than a pleasure for her.

She should certainly return from her exile, — she did not doubt that a single instant ; but how long might this exile last ? For an active, ambitious nature, like that of Milady, days not spent in climbing are inauspicious days. What word, then, can be found to describe the days which they occupy in descending ? To lose a year, two years, three years, is to talk of an eternity ; to return after the

death or disgrace of the cardinal, perhaps ; to return when D'Artagnan and his friends, happy and triumphant, should have received from the queen the reward they had well acquired by the services they had rendered her, — these were devouring ideas that a woman like Milady could not endure. For the rest, the storm which raged within her doubled her strength, and she would have burst the walls of her prison if her body had been able to take for a single instant the proportions of her mind.

Then that which spurred her on additionally in the midst of all this was the remembrance of the cardinal. What must the mistrustful, restless, suspicious cardinal think of her silence, — the cardinal, not merely her only support, her only prop, her only protector at present, but still further, the principal instrument of her future fortune and vengeance? She knew him ; she knew that at her return from a fruitless journey it would be in vain to tell him of her imprisonment, in vain to enlarge upon the sufferings she had undergone. The cardinal would reply, with the sarcastic calmness of the sceptic, strong at once by power and genius, “ You should not have allowed yourself to be taken.”

Then Milady collected all her energies, murmuring in the depths of her soul the name of Felton, — the only beam of light that penetrated to her in the hell into which she had fallen ; and like a serpent which folds and unfolds its rings to ascertain its strength, she enveloped Felton beforehand in the thousand meshes of her inventive imagination.

Time, however, passed away ; the hours, one after another, seemed to awaken the clock as they passed, and every blow of the brass hammer resounded upon the heart of the prisoner. At nine o'clock, Lord de Winter made his customary visit, examined the window and the bars,

sounded the floor and the walls, looked to the chimney and the doors, without, during this long and minute examination, he or Milady pronouncing a single word.

Doubtless both of them understood that the situation had become too serious to lose time in useless words and aimless wrath.

"Well," said the baron, on leaving her, "you will not escape to-night!"

At ten o'clock Felton came and placed the sentinel. Milady recognized his step. She was as well acquainted with it now as a mistress is with that of the lover of her heart; and yet Milady at the same time detested and despised this weak fanatic.

That was not the appointed hour. Felton did not enter.

Two hours after, as midnight sounded, the sentinel was relieved. This time it *was* the hour, and from this moment Milady waited with impatience. The new sentinel commenced his walk in the corridor. At the expiration of ten minutes Felton came.

Milady was all attention.

"Listen," said the young man to the sentinel. "On no pretence leave the door, for you know that last night my Lord punished a soldier for having quitted his post for an instant, although I, during his absence, watched in his place."

"Yes, I know it," said the soldier.

"I recommend you therefore to keep the strictest watch. For my part I am going to pay a second visit to this woman, who I fear entertains sinister intentions upon her own life, and I have received orders to watch her."

"Good!" murmured Milady; "the austere Puritan lies."

As to the soldier, he only smiled.

"Zounds, Lieutenant!" said he; "you are not unlucky in being charged with such commissions, particularly if my Lord has authorized you to look into her bed."

Felton blushed. Under any other circumstances he would have reprimanded the soldier for indulging in such pleasantry, but his conscience murmured too loud for his mouth to dare speak.

"If I call, come," said he. "If any one comes, call me."

"I will, Lieutenant," said the soldier.

Felton entered Milady's apartment. Milady arose.

"You are here!" said she.

"I promised you to come," said Felton, "and I have come."

"You promised me something else."

"What, my God?" said the young man, who in spite of his self-command felt his knees tremble and the sweat start from his brow.

"You promised to bring a knife, and to leave it with me after our interview."

"Say no more of that, Madame," said Felton. "There is no situation, however terrible it may be, which can authorize a creature of God to inflict death upon himself. I have reflected, and I cannot, must not be guilty of such a sin."

"Ah, you have reflected!" said the prisoner, sitting down in her armchair, with a smile of disdain; "and I also have reflected."

"Upon what?"

"That I can have nothing to say to a man who does not keep his word."

"Oh, my God!" murmured Felton.

"You may retire," said Milady. "I will not talk."

"Here is the knife," said Felton, drawing from his pocket the weapon which he had brought, according to his promise, but which he hesitated to give to his prisoner.

"Let me see it," said Milady.

"For what purpose?"

"Upon my honor, I will instantly return it to you. You shall place it on that table, and you may remain between it and me."

Felton offered the weapon to Milady, who examined the temper of it attentively, and who tried the point on the tip of her finger.

"Well," said she, returning the knife to the young officer, "this is fine and good steel. You are a faithful friend, Felton."

Felton took back the weapon, and laid it upon the table, as he had agreed with the prisoner.

Milady followed him with her eyes, and made a gesture of satisfaction.

"Now," said she, "listen to me."

The request was needless. The young officer stood upright before her, awaiting her words as if to devour them.

"Felton," said Milady, with a solemnity full of melancholy, "imagine that your sister, the daughter of your father, speaks to you. While yet young, unfortunately handsome, I was dragged into a snare. I resisted. Ambushes and violences multiplied around me, but I resisted. The religion I serve, the God I adore, were blasphemed because I called upon that religion and that God, but still I resisted. Then outrages were heaped upon me, and as my soul was not subdued they wished to defile my body forever. Finally —"

Milady stopped, and a bitter smile passed over her lips.

"Finally," said Felton, — "finally, what did they do?"

"At length, one evening, my enemy resolved to para-

lyze the resistance he could not conquer. One evening he mixed a powerful narcotic with my water. Scarcely had I finished my repast, when I felt myself sink by degrees into a strange torpor. Although I was without mistrust, a vague fear seized me, and I tried to struggle against sleepiness. I arose. I wished to run to the window and call for help, but my legs refused their office. It appeared as if the ceiling sank upon my head and crushed me with its weight. I stretched out my arms. I tried to speak. I could only utter inarticulate sounds, and irresistible faintness came over me. I supported myself by a chair, feeling that I was about to fall, but this support was soon insufficient on account of my weak arms. I fell upon one knee, then upon both. I tried to pray, but my tongue was frozen. God doubtless neither heard nor saw me, and I sank upon the floor a prey to a slumber which resembled death.

“Of all that passed in that sleep, or the time which glided away while it lasted, I have no remembrance. The only thing I recollect is that I awoke in bed in a round chamber, the furniture of which was sumptuous, and into which light only penetrated by an opening in the ceiling. No door gave entrance to the room. It might be called a magnificent prison.

“It was a long time before I was able to make out what place I was in, or to take account of the details I describe. My mind appeared to strive in vain to shake off the heavy darkness of the sleep from which I could not rouse myself. I had vague perceptions of space traversed, of the rolling of a carriage, of a horrible dream in which my strength had become exhausted; but all this was so dark and so indistinct in my mind that these events seemed to belong to another life than mine, and yet mixed with mine in fantastic duality.

“ At times the state into which I was fallen appeared so strange that I believed myself dreaming. I arose trembling. My clothes were near me on a chair ; I neither remembered having undressed myself, nor going to bed. Then by degrees the reality broke upon me, full of chaste terrors. I was no longer in the house where I had dwelt. As well as I could judge by the light of the sun, the day was already two-thirds gone. It was the evening before when I had fallen asleep ; my sleep then must have lasted twenty-four hours ! What had taken place during this long sleep ?

“ I dressed myself as quickly as possible ; my slow and stiff motions all attested that the effects of the narcotic were not yet entirely dissipated. The chamber was evidently furnished for the reception of a woman ; and the most finished coquette could not have formed a wish, but on casting her eyes about the apartment, she would have found that wish accomplished.

“ Certainly I was not the first captive that had been shut up in this splendid prison ; but you may easily comprehend, Felton, that the more superb the prison, the greater was my terror.

“ Yes, it was a prison, for I tried in vain to get out of it. I sounded all the walls, in the hopes of discovering a door, but everywhere the walls returned a full and flat sound.

“ I made the tour of the room at least twenty times, in search of an outlet of some kind ; there was none. I sank exhausted with fatigue and terror into an armchair.

“ Meantime, night came on rapidly, and with night my terrors increased. I did not know but I had better remain where I was seated. It appeared that I was surrounded with unknown dangers into which I was about to fall at every instant. Although I had eaten nothing since the evening before, my fears prevented my feeling hunger.

"No noise from without by which I could measure the time reached me; I only supposed it must be seven or eight o'clock in the evening, for it was in the month of October, and it was quite dark.

"All at once the noise of a door, turning on its hinges, made me start. A globe of fire appeared above the glazed opening of the ceiling, casting a strong light into my chamber; and I perceived with terror that a man was standing within a few paces of me.

"A table, with two covers, bearing a supper ready prepared, stood, as if by magic, in the middle of the apartment.

"That man was he who had pursued me during a whole year, who had vowed my dishonor, and who, by the first words that issued from his mouth, gave me to understand he had accomplished it the preceding night."

"Scoundrel!" murmured Felton.

"Oh, yes, scoundrel!" cried Milady, seeing the interest which the young officer, whose soul seemed to hang on her lips, took in this strange recital. "Oh, yes, scoundrel! He believed, having triumphed over me in my sleep, that all was completed. He came, hoping that I would accept my shame, as my shame was consummated; he came to offer his fortune in exchange for my love.

"All that the heart of a woman could contain of haughty contempt and disdainful words, I poured out upon this man. Doubtless he was accustomed to such reproaches, for he listened to me calm and smiling, with his arms crossed over his breast. Then, when he thought I had said all, he advanced towards me; I sprang towards the table, I seized a knife, I placed it to my breast.

"'Take one step more,' said I, 'and in addition to my dishonor, you shall have my death to reproach yourself with.'

"There was, no doubt, in my look, my voice, my whole person, that sincerity of gesture, of attitude, of accent, which carries conviction to the most perverse minds, for he paused.

" 'Your death ?' said he ; 'oh, no, you are too charming a mistress to allow me to consent to lose you thus, after I have had the happiness to possess you only a single time. Adieu, my charmer ; I will wait to pay you my next visit till you are in a better humor.'

"At these words he blew a whistle ; the globe of fire which lighted the room re-ascended and disappeared. I found myself again in complete darkness. The same noise of a door opening and shutting was repeated the instant afterwards ; the flaming globe descended afresh, and I was completely alone.

"This moment was frightful ; if I had any doubts as to my misfortune, these doubts had vanished in an overwhelming reality. I was in the power of a man whom I not only detested, but despised, — of a man capable of anything, and who had already given me a fatal proof of what he was able to do."

"But who, then, was this man ?" asked Felton.

"I passed the night on a chair, starting at the least noise, for towards midnight the lamp went out, and I was again in darkness. But the night passed away without any fresh attempt on the part of my persecutor. Day came ; the table had disappeared, only I had still the knife in my hand.

"This knife was my only hope.

"I was worn out with fatigue. Sleeplessness inflamed my eyes ; I had not dared to sleep a single instant. The light of day re-assured me ; I went and threw myself on the bed, without parting with the emancipating knife, which I concealed under my pillow.

“When I awoke, a fresh meal was served.

“This time, in spite of my terrors, in spite of my agony, I began to feel a devouring hunger. It was forty-eight hours since I had taken any nourishment. I ate some bread and some fruit; then, remembering the narcotic mixed with the water I had drunk, I would not touch that which was placed on the table, but filled my glass at a marble fountain fixed in the wall over my dressing-table.

“And yet, notwithstanding these precautions, I remained for some time in a terrible agitation of mind. But my fears were this time ill-founded; I passed the day without experiencing anything of the kind I dreaded.

“I took the precaution to half empty the *carafe*, in order that my suspicions might not be noticed.

“The evening came on, and with it darkness; but however profound was this darkness, my eyes began to accustom themselves to it. I saw, amid the shadows, the table sink through the floor; a quarter of an hour later it re-appeared, bearing my supper. In an instant, thanks to the lamp, my chamber was once more lighted.

“I was determined to eat only such things as could not possibly have anything soporific introduced into them. Two eggs and some fruit composed my repast; then I drew another glass of water from my protecting fountain, and drank it.

“At the first swallow, it appeared to me not to have the same taste as in the morning. Suspicion instantly seized me. I paused, but I had already drunk half a glass.

“I threw the rest away with horror, and waited, with the dew of fear upon my brow.

“No doubt some invisible witness had seen me draw the water from that fountain, and had taken advantage of my confidence in it, the better to assure my ruin, so coolly resolved upon, so cruelly pursued.

"Half-an-hour had not passed when the same symptoms began to appear; but as I had only drunk half a glass of the water, I contended longer, and instead of falling entirely asleep, I sank into a state of drowsiness which left me a perception of what was passing around me, while depriving me of the strength either to defend myself or to fly.

"I dragged myself towards the bed, to seek the only defence I had left, — my saving knife; but I could not reach the bolster. I sank on my knees, my hands clasped round one of the bedposts; then I felt that I was lost."

Felton became frightfully pale, and a convulsive tremor crept through his whole body.

"And what was most frightful," continued Milady, her voice altered, as if she still experienced the same agony as at that awful minute, "was that at this time I retained a consciousness of the danger that threatened me; was that my soul, if I may say so, waked in my sleeping body; was that I saw, that I heard. It is true that all was like a dream, but it was not the less frightful.

"I saw the lamp ascend, and leave me in darkness; then I heard the well-known creaking of the door, although I had heard that door open but twice.

"I felt instinctively that some one approached me; it is said that the doomed wretch in the deserts of America thus feels the approach of the serpent.

"I wished to make an effort; I attempted to cry out. By an incredible effort of will I even raised myself up, but only to sink down again immediately, and to fall into the arms of my persecutor."

"Tell me who this man was!" cried the young officer.

Milady saw at a single glance all the painful feelings she inspired in Felton by dwelling on every detail of her recital; but she would not spare him a single pang. The

more profoundly she wounded his heart, the more certainly he would avenge her. She continued, then, as if she had not heard his exclamation, or as if she thought the moment was not yet come to reply to it.

"Only this time it was no longer an inert body, without feeling, that the villain had to deal with. I have told you that without being able to regain the complete exercise of my faculties, I retained the sense of my danger. I struggled, then, with all my strength, and doubtless opposed, weak as I was, a long resistance, for I heard him cry out, 'These miserable Puritans! I knew very well that they tired out their executioners, but I did not believe them so strong against their lovers!'

"Alas! this desperate resistance could not last long. I felt my strength fail, and this time it was not my sleep that enabled the coward to prevail, but my swoon."

Felton listened without uttering any word or sound, except an inward expression of agony. The sweat streamed down his marble forehead, and his hand, under his coat, tore his breast.

"My first impulse, on coming to myself, was to feel under my pillow for the knife I had not been able to reach; if it had not been useful for defence, it might at least serve for expiation.

"But on taking this knife, Felton, a terrible idea occurred to me. I have sworn to tell you all, and I will tell you all. I have promised you the truth; I will tell it, were it to destroy me."

"The idea came into your mind to avenge yourself on this man, did it not?" cried Felton.

"Yes," said Milady. "The idea was not that of a Christian, I knew; but without doubt, that eternal enemy of our souls, that lion roaring constantly around us, breathed it into my mind. In short, what shall I say to you,

Felton?" continued Milady, in the tone of a woman accusing herself of a crime. "This idea occurred to me, and did not leave me; it is of this homicidal thought that I now bear the punishment."

"Continue, continue!" said Felton; "I am eager to see you attain your vengeance!"

"Oh, I resolved that it should take place as soon as possible. I had no doubt he would return the following night. During the day I had nothing to fear.

"When the hour of breakfast came, therefore, I did not hesitate to eat and drink. I had determined to make believe sup, but to eat nothing. I was forced, then, to combat the fast of the evening with the nourishment of the morning.

"Only I concealed a glass of water, which remained after my breakfast, thirst having been the chief of my sufferings when I remained forty-eight hours without eating or drinking.

"The day passed away without having any other influence on me than to strengthen the resolution I had formed; only I took care that my face should not betray the thoughts of my heart, for I had no doubt I was watched. Several times, even, I felt a smile on my lips. Felton, I dare not tell you at what idea I smiled; you would hold me in horror —"

"Go on! go on!" said Felton; "you see plainly that I listen, and that I am anxious to know the end."

"Evening came; the ordinary events took place. During the darkness, as before, my supper was brought. Then the lamp was lighted, and I sat down to table. I only ate some fruit. I pretended to pour out water from the jug, but I only drank that which I had saved in my glass. The substitution was made so carefully that my spies, if I had any, could have no suspicion of it.

"After supper I exhibited the same marks of languor as on the preceding evening ; but this time, as if I yielded to fatigue, or as if I had become familiarized with danger, I dragged myself towards my bed, let my robe fall, and lay down.

"I found my knife where I had placed it, under my pillow, and while feigning to sleep, my hand grasped the handle of it convulsively.

"Two hours passed away without anything fresh happening. Oh, my God ! who could have said so the evening before ? I began to fear that he would not come.

"At length I saw the lamp rise softly, and disappear in the depths of the ceiling ; my chamber was filled with darkness and obscurity, but I made a strong effort to penetrate this darkness and obscurity.

"Nearly ten minutes passed ; I heard no other noise but the beating of my own heart. I implored Heaven that he might come.

"At length I heard the well-known noise of the door, which opened and shut ; I heard, notwithstanding the thickness of the carpet, a step which made the floor creak ; I saw, notwithstanding the darkness, a shadow which approached my bed."

"Haste, haste !" said Felton ; "do you not see that each of your words burns me like molten lead ?"

"Then," continued Milady, "then I collected all my strength ; I recalled to my mind that the moment of vengeance, or rather, of justice, had struck. I looked upon myself as another Judith ; I gathered myself up, my knife in my hand, and when I saw him near me, stretching out his arms to find his victim, then, with the last cry of agony and despair, I struck him in the middle of his breast.

"The miserable villain ! He had foreseen all. His

breast was covered with a coat-of-mail ; the knife was bent against it.

“ ‘ Ah, ah ! ’ cried he, seizing my arm, and wresting from me the weapon that had so badly served me, ‘ you want to take my life, do you, my pretty Puritan ? But that’s more than dislike, that’s ingratitude ! Come, come, calm yourself, my sweet girl ! I thought you had softened. I am not one of those tyrants who detain women by force. You don’t love me. With my usual fatuity I doubted it ; now I am convinced. To-morrow you shall be free.’ ”

“ I had but one wish ; that was that he should kill me.

“ ‘ Beware ! ’ said I, ‘ for my liberty is your dishonor.’ ”

“ ‘ Explain yourself, my pretty sibyl ! ’ ”

“ ‘ Yes ; for as soon as I leave this place I will tell everything. I will proclaim the violence you have used towards me. I will describe my captivity. I will denounce this palace of infamy. You are placed on high, my Lord, but tremble ! Above you there is the king ; above the king there is God ! ’ ”

“ However perfect master he was over himself, my persecutor allowed a movement of anger to escape him. I could not see the expression of his countenance, but I felt the arm tremble upon which my hand was placed.

“ ‘ Then you shall not leave this place,’ said he.

“ ‘ Very well,’ cried I, ‘ then the place of my punishment will be that of my tomb. I will die here, and you will see if a phantom that accuses is not more terrible than a living being that threatens ! ’ ”

“ ‘ You shall have no weapon left in your power.’ ”

“ ‘ There is a weapon which despair has placed within the reach of every creature who has the courage to use it. I will allow myself to die with hunger.’ ”

“ ‘ Come,’ said the wretch, ‘ is not peace much better

than such a war as that? I will restore you to liberty this moment; I will proclaim you a piece of immaculate virtue; I will name you the Lucretia of England.'

" 'And I will say that you are the Sextus. I will denounce you before men, as I have denounced you before God; and if it be necessary that, like Lucretia, I should sign my accusation with my blood, I will sign it.'

" 'Ah!' said my enemy, in a jeering tone, 'that's quite another thing. My faith! everything considered, you are very well off here. You shall want for nothing, and if you let yourself die of hunger that will be your own fault.'

" At these words he retired. I heard the door open and shut, and I remained overwhelmed, less, I confess it, by my grief than by the mortification of not having avenged myself.

" He kept his word. All the day, all the next night passed away without my seeing him again. But I also kept my word with him, and I neither ate nor drank. I was, as I had told him, resolved to die of hunger.

" I passed the day and the night in prayer, for I hoped that God would pardon me my suicide.

" The second night the door opened; I was lying on the floor, for my strength began to abandon me.

" At the noise I raised myself up on one hand.

" 'Well,' said a voice which vibrated in too terrible a manner in my ear not to be recognized, — 'well! Are we softened a little? Will we not pay for our liberty with a single promise of silence? Come, I am a good sort of a prince,' added he, 'and although I like not Puritans I do them justice; and it is the same with Puritanesses, when they are pretty. Come, take a little oath for me on the cross; I won't ask anything more of you.'

" 'On the cross,' cried I, rising, for at that abhorred

voice I had recovered all my strength, — ‘on the cross I swear that no promise, no menace, no force, no torture, shall close my mouth ! On the cross I swear to denounce you everywhere as a murderer, as a thief of honor, as a base coward ! On the cross I swear, if I ever leave this place, to call down vengeance upon you from the whole human race !’

“ ‘Beware !’ said the voice, in a threatening accent that I had never yet heard. ‘I have an extraordinary means which I will not employ but in the last extremity to close your mouth, or at least to prevent any one from believing a word you may utter.’

“I mustered all my strength to reply to him with a burst of laughter.

“He saw that it was a merciless war between us, — a war to the death.

“ ‘Listen !’ said he. ‘I give you the rest of to-night and all day to-morrow. Reflect : promise to be silent, and riches, consideration, even honor, shall surround you ; threaten to speak, and I will condemn you to infamy.’

“ ‘You ?’ cried I. ‘You ?’

“ ‘To interminable, ineffaceable infamy !’

“ ‘You ?’ repeated I. Oh, I declare to you, Felton, I thought him mad !

“ ‘Yes, yes, I !’ replied he.

“ ‘Oh, leave me !’ said I. ‘Begone, if you do not desire to see me dash my head against that wall before your eyes !’

“ ‘Very well, it is your own doing. Till to-morrow evening, then !’

“ ‘Till to-morrow evening, then !’ replied I, allowing myself to fall, and biting the carpet with rage.”

Felton leaned for support upon a piece of furniture ; and Milady saw, with the joy of a demon, that his strength would fail him perhaps before the end of her recital.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MEANS FOR CLASSICAL TRAGEDY.

AFTER a moment of silence employed by Milady in observing the young man who listened to her, Milady continued her recital.

“It was nearly three days since I had eaten or drunk anything. I suffered frightful torments. At times there passed before me clouds which pressed my brow, which veiled my eyes; this was delirium.

“When the evening came I was so weak that every time I fainted I thanked God, for I thought I was about to die.

“In the midst of one of these swoons I heard the door open. Terror recalled me to myself.

“He entered the apartment followed by a man in a mask. He was masked likewise; but I knew his step, I knew his voice, I knew him by that imposing bearing which hell has bestowed upon his person for the curse of humanity.

“‘Well,’ said he to me, ‘have you made your mind up to take the oath I requested of you?’

“‘You have said Puritans have but one word. Mine you have heard, and that is to pursue you, — on earth to the tribunal of men, in heaven to the tribunal of God.’

“‘You persist, then?’

“‘I swear it before the God who hears me. I will take the whole world as a witness of your crime, and that until I have found an avenger.’

“‘You are a prostitute,’ said he, in a voice of thunder, ‘and you shall undergo the punishment of prostitutes! Branded in the eyes of the world you invoke, try to prove to that world that you are neither guilty nor mad!’”

“Then, addressing the man who accompanied him, ‘Executioner,’ said he, ‘do your duty.’”

“Oh, his name, his name!” cried Felton. “His name, tell it me!”

“Then in spite of my cries, in spite of my resistance, — for I began to comprehend that there was a question of something worse than death, — the executioner seized me, threw me on the floor, fastened me with his bonds, and suffocated by sobs, almost without sense, invoking God, who did not listen to me, I uttered all at once a frightful cry of pain and shame. A burning fire, a red-hot iron, the iron of the executioner, was imprinted on my shoulder.”

Felton uttered a groan.

“Here,” said Milady, rising with the majesty of a queen, — “here, Felton, behold the new martyrdom invented for a pure young girl, the victim of the brutality of a villain. Learn to know the heart of men, and henceforth make yourself less easily the instrument of their unjust vengeance.”

Milady, with a rapid gesture, opened her robe, tore the cambric that covered her bosom, and red with feigned anger and simulated shame, showed the young man the ineffaceable impression which dishonored that beautiful shoulder.

“But,” cried Felton, “that is a *fleur-de-lis* which I see there.”

“And therein consisted the infamy,” replied Milady. “The brand of England! — it would be necessary to prove

what tribunal had imposed it on me, and I could have made a public appeal to all the tribunals of the kingdom ; but the brand of France !— oh, by that, by *that* I was branded indeed ! ”

This was too much for Felton.

Pale, motionless, overwhelmed by this frightful revelation, dazzled by the superhuman beauty of this woman who unveiled herself before him with an immodesty which appeared to him sublime, he ended by falling on his knees before her as the early Christians did before those pure and holy martyrs whom the persecution of the emperors gave up in the circus to the sanguinary sensuality of the populace. The brand disappeared ; the beauty alone remained.

“ Pardon ! pardon ! ” cried Felton, “ oh, pardon ! ”

Milady read in his eyes *love ! love !*

“ Pardon for what ? ” asked she.

“ Pardon me for having joined with your persecutors. ”

Milady held out her hand to him.

“ So beautiful ! so young ! ” cried Felton, covering that hand with his kisses.

Milady let one of those looks fall upon him which make a slave of a king.

Felton was a Puritan ; he abandoned the hand of this woman to kiss her feet.

He no longer loved her ; he adored her.

When this crisis was past, when Milady appeared to have resumed her self-possession, which she had never lost ; when Felton had seen her recover with the veil of chastity those treasures of love which were only concealed from him to make him desire them the more ardently, he said, “ Ah, now ! I have only one thing to ask of you ; that is, the name of your true executioner. For to me there is but one ; the other was an instrument, that was all. ”

"What, Brother!" cried Milady, "must I name him again? Have you not yet divined who he is?"

"What?" cried Felton, "he — again he — always he? What, — the truly guilty?"

"The truly guilty," said Milady, "is the ravager of England, the persecutor of true believers, the base ravisher of the honor of so many women, — he who, to satisfy a caprice of his corrupt heart, is about to make England shed so much blood, who protects the Protestants to-day and will betray them to-morrow —"

"Buckingham! It is, then, Buckingham!" cried Felton, in a high state of excitement.

Milady concealed her face in her hands, as if she could not endure the shame which this name recalled to her.

"Buckingham, the executioner of this angelic creature!" cried Felton. "And thou hast not hurled thy thunder at him, my God! And thou hast left him noble, honored, powerful, for the ruin of us all!"

"God abandons him who abandons himself," said Milady.

"But he will draw down upon his head the punishment reserved for the damned!" said Felton, with increasing exultation. "He wills that human vengeance should precede celestial justice."

"Men fear him and spare him."

"I," said Felton, — "I do not fear him, nor will I spare him."

The soul of Milady was bathed in an infernal joy.

"But how can Lord de Winter, my protector, my father," asked Felton, "possibly be mixed up with all this?"

"Listen, Felton," resumed Milady, "for by the side of base and contemptible men there are often found great and generous natures. I had an affianced husband, a man whom

I loved, and who loved me, — a heart like yours, Felton, a man like you. I went to him and told him all ; he knew me, that man did, and did not doubt an instant. He was a nobleman, a man equal to Buckingham in every respect. He said nothing ; he only girded on his sword, wrapped himself in his cloak, and went straight to Buckingham Palace."

"Yes, yes," said Felton ; "I understand how he would act. But with such men it is not the sword that should be employed ; it is the poniard."

"Buckingham had left England the day before, sent as ambassador to Spain, to demand the hand of the Infanta for King Charles I., who was then only Prince of Wales. My affianced husband returned.

"‘Hear me,’ said he ; ‘this man is gone, and for the moment has consequently escaped my vengeance ; but let us be united, as we were to have been, and then leave it to Lord de Winter to maintain his own honor and that of his wife.’"

"Lord de Winter !" cried Felton.

"Yes," said Milady, "Lord de Winter ; and now you can understand it all, can you not ? Buckingham remained nearly a year absent. A week before his return Lord de Winter died, leaving me his sole heir. Whence came the blow ? God who knows all, knows without doubt ; but as for me, I accuse nobody."

"Oh, what an abyss ; what an abyss !" cried Felton.

"Lord de Winter died without revealing anything to his brother. The terrible secret was to be concealed till it burst, like a clap of thunder, over the head of the guilty. Your protector had seen with pain this marriage of his elder brother with a portionless girl. I was sensible that I could look for no support from a man disappointed in his hopes of an inheritance. I went to France, with a de-

termination to remain there for the rest of my life. But all my fortune is in England. Communication being closed by the war, I was in want of everything. I was then obliged to come back again. Six days ago, I landed at Portsmouth."

"Well?" said Felton.

"Well; Buckingham heard by some means, no doubt, of my return. He spoke of me to Lord de Winter, already prejudiced against me, and told him that his sister-in-law was a prostitute, a branded woman. The noble and pure voice of my husband was no longer here to defend me. Lord de Winter believed all that was told him with so much the more ease that it was his interest to believe it. He caused me to be arrested, had me conducted hither, and placed me under your guard. You know the rest. The day after to-morrow he banishes me, he transports me; the day after to-morrow he exiles me among the infamous. Oh, the train is well laid; the plot is clever. My honor will not survive it! You see, then, Felton, I can do nothing but die. Felton, give me that knife!"

And at these words, as if all her strength was exhausted, Milady sank, weak and languishing, into the arms of the young officer, who, intoxicated with love, anger, and voluptuous sensations hitherto unknown, received her with transport, pressed her against his heart, all trembling at the breath from that charming mouth, bewildered by the contact with that palpitating bosom.

"No, no," said he. "No, you shall live honored and pure; you shall live to triumph over your enemies."

Milady put him from her slowly with her hand, while drawing him nearer with her look; but Felton, in his turn, embraced her more closely, imploring her like a divinity.

"Oh, death, death!" said she, lowering her voice and

her eyelids, — “oh, death, rather than shame! Felton, my brother, my friend, I conjure you!”

“No,” cried Felton, “no; you shall live, and you shall be avenged.”

“Felton, I bring misfortune to all who surround me! Felton, abandon me! Felton, let me die!”

“Well, then, we will live and die together!” cried he, pressing his lips to those of the prisoner.

Several strokes resounded on the door; this time Milady really pushed him away from her.

“Hark,” said she, “we have been overheard! Some one is coming! All is over! We are lost!”

“No,” said Felton; “it is only the sentinel warning me that they are about to change guard.”

“Then run to the door, and open it yourself.”

Felton obeyed; this woman was now his whole thought, his whole soul.

He found himself face to face with a sergeant commanding a watch-patrol.

“Well, what is the matter?” asked the young lieutenant.

“You told me to open the door if I heard any one cry out,” said the soldier; “but you forgot to leave me the key. I heard you cry out, without understanding what you said. I tried to open the door, but it was locked inside; then I called the sergeant.”

“And here I am,” said the sergeant.

Felton, quite bewildered, almost mad, stood speechless.

Milady plainly perceived that it was now her turn to take part in the scene. She ran to the table, and seizing the knife which Felton had laid down, exclaimed, “And by what right will you prevent me from dying?”

“Great God!” exclaimed Felton, on seeing the knife glitter in her hand.

At that moment a burst of ironical laughter resounded through the corridor. The baron, attracted by the noise, in his chamber-gown, his sword under his arm, stood in the doorway.

"Ah," said he, "here we are, at the last act of the tragedy. You see, Felton, the drama has gone through all the phases I named; but be easy, no blood will flow."

Milady perceived that all was lost unless she gave Felton an immediate and terrible proof of her courage.

"You are mistaken, my Lord, blood will flow; and may that blood fall back on those who cause it to flow!"

Felton uttered a cry, and rushed towards her. He was too late; Milady had stabbed herself.

But the knife had fortunately, we ought to say skilfully, come in contact with the steel busk, which at that period, like a cuirass, defended the chests of women. It had glided down it, tearing the robe, and had penetrated slantingly between the flesh and the ribs. Milady's robe was not the less stained with blood in a second.

Milady fell down, and seemed to be in a swoon.

Felton snatched away the knife.

"See, my Lord," said he, in a deep, gloomy tone, "here is a woman who was under my guard, and who has killed herself!"

"Be at ease, Felton," said Lord de Winter. "She is not dead; demons do not die so easily. Be tranquil, and go wait for me in my chamber."

"But, my Lord —"

"Go, sir, I command you!"

At this injunction from his superior, Felton obeyed; but in going out, he put the knife into his bosom.

As to Lord de Winter, he contented himself with calling the woman who waited on Milady, and when she was

come, he recommended the prisoner, who was still fainting, to her care, and left them alone.

Meanwhile, all things considered and notwithstanding his suspicions, as the wound might be serious, he immediately sent off a mounted man to find a physician.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ESCAPE.

As Lord de Winter had thought, Milady's wound was not dangerous. So soon as she was left alone with the woman whom the baron had summoned to her assistance she opened her eyes.

It was, however, necessary to affect weakness and pain, — not a very difficult task for so finished an actress as Milady. Thus the poor woman was completely the dupe of the prisoner, whom, notwithstanding her hints, she persisted in watching all night.

But the presence of this woman did not prevent Milady from thinking.

There was no longer a doubt that Felton was convinced ; Felton was hers. If an angel appeared to that young man as an accuser of Milady, he would take him, in the mental disposition in which he now found himself, for a messenger sent by the Devil.

Milady smiled at this thought, for Felton was now her only hope, — her only means of safety.

But Lord de Winter might suspect him ; Felton himself might now be watched !

Towards four o'clock in the morning the doctor arrived ; but since the time Milady stabbed herself, however short, the wound had closed. The doctor could therefore measure neither the direction nor the depth of it ; he only satisfied himself by Milady's pulse that the case was not serious.

In the morning Milady, under the pretext that she had not slept well in the night and wanted rest, sent away the woman who attended her.

She had one hope, which was that Felton would appear at the breakfast hour ; but Felton did not come.

Were her fears realized ? Was Felton, suspected by the baron, about to fail her at the decisive moment ? She had only one day left. Lord de Winter had announced her embarkation for the twenty-third, and it was now the morning of the twenty-second.

Nevertheless she still waited patiently till the hour for dinner.

Although she had eaten nothing in the morning, the dinner was brought in at its usual time. Milady then perceived, with terror, that the uniform of the soldiers who guarded her was changed.

Then she ventured to ask what had become of Felton.

She was told that he had left the castle an hour before on horseback. She inquired if the baron was still at the castle. The soldier replied that he was, and that he had given orders to be informed if the prisoner wished to speak to him.

Milady replied that she was too weak at present, and that her only desire was to be left alone.

The soldier went out, leaving the dinner served.

Felton was sent away. The marines were removed. Felton was then mistrusted.

This was the last blow to the prisoner.

Left alone, she arose. The bed, which she had kept from prudence, and that they might believe her seriously wounded, burned her like a bed of fire. She cast a glance at the door ; the baron had had a plank nailed over the grating. He no doubt feared that by this opening she might still by some diabolical means corrupt her guards.

Milady smiled with joy. She was free now to give way to her transports without being observed. She traversed her chamber with the excitement of a furious maniac, or of a tigress shut up in an iron cage. *Certes*, if the knife had been left in her power, she would now have thought, not of killing herself, but of killing the baron.

At six o'clock Lord de Winter came in. He was armed at all points. This man, in whom Milady till that time had only seen a very simple gentleman, had become an admirable jailer. He appeared to foresee all, to divine all, to anticipate all.

A single look at Milady apprised him of all that was passing in her mind.

"Ay!" said he, "I see; but you shall not kill me to-day. You have no longer a weapon; and besides, I am on my guard. You had begun to pervert my poor Felton. He was yielding to your infernal influence; but I will save him. He will never see you again; all is over. Get your clothes together. To-morrow you will go. I had fixed the embarkation for the twenty-fourth; but I have reflected that the more promptly the affair takes place the more sure it will be. To-morrow, by twelve o'clock, I shall have the order for your exile, signed, *Buckingham*. If you speak a single word to any one before going aboard ship, my sergeant will blow your brains out. He has orders to do so. If when on the ship you speak a single word to any one before the captain permits you, the captain will have you thrown into the sea. That is agreed upon.

"*Au revoir*, then; that is all I have to say to-day. To-morrow I will see you again, to take my leave." With these words the baron went out. Milady had listened to all this menacing tirade with a smile of disdain on her lips, but rage in her heart.

Supper was served. Milady felt that she stood in need of all her strength. She did not know what might take place during this night which approached so menacingly, — for large masses of cloud rolled over the face of the sky, and distant lightning announced a storm.

The storm broke about ten o'clock. Milady felt a consolation in seeing nature partake of the disorder of her heart. The thunder growled in the air like the passion and anger in her thoughts. It appeared to her that the blast as it swept along dishevelled her brow, as it bowed the branches of the trees and bore away their leaves. She howled as the hurricane howled; and her voice was lost in the great voice of nature, which also seemed to groan with despair.

All at once she heard a tap at her window, and by the help of a flash of lightning she saw the face of a man appear behind the bars.

She ran to the window and opened it.

"Felton!" cried she. "I am saved."

"Yes," said Felton; "but silence, silence! I must have time to file through these bars. Only take care that I am not seen through the wicket."

"Oh, it is a proof that the Lord is on our side, Felton," replied Milady. "They have closed up the grating with a board."

"That is well; God has made them senseless," said Felton.

"But what must I do?" asked Milady.

"Nothing, nothing, only shut the window. Go to bed, or at least lie down in your clothes. As soon as I have done I will knock on one of the panes of glass. But will you be able to follow me?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Your wound?"

"Gives me pain, but will not prevent my walking."

"Be ready, then, at the first signal."

Milady shut the window, extinguished the lamp, and went, as Felton had desired her, to lie down on the bed. Amid the moaning of the storm she heard the grinding of the file upon the bars, and by the light of every flash she perceived the shadow of Felton through the panes.

She passed an hour without breathing, panting, with a cold sweat upon her brow, and her heart oppressed by frightful agony at every movement she heard in the corridor.

There are hours which last a year.

At the expiration of an hour, Felton tapped again.

Milady sprang out of bed and opened the window. Two bars removed formed an opening for a man to pass through.

"Are you ready?" asked Felton.

"Yes. Must I take anything with me?"

"Money, if you have any."

"Yes; fortunately they have left me all I had."

"So much the better, for I have expended all mine in chartering a vessel."

"Here!" said Milady, placing a bag full of louis in Felton's hands.

Felton took the bag and threw it to the foot of the wall.

"Now," said he, "will you come?"

"I am ready."

Milady mounted upon a chair and passed the upper part of her body through the window. She saw the young officer suspended over the abyss by a ladder of ropes. For the first time an emotion of terror reminded her that she was a woman. The dark space frightened her.

"I expected this," said Felton.

"It's nothing, it's nothing!" said Milady. "I will descend with my eyes shut."

"Have you confidence in me?" said Felton.

"You ask that?"

"Put your two hands together. Cross them; that's right!"

Felton tied her two wrists together with his handkerchief, and then with a cord over the handkerchief.

"What are you doing?" asked Milady, with surprise.

"Pass your arms around my neck, and fear nothing."

"But I shall make you lose your balance, and we shall both be dashed to pieces."

"Don't be afraid. I am a sailor."

Not a second was to be lost. Milady passed her two arms round Felton's neck, and let herself slip out of the window. Felton began to descend the ladder slowly, step by step. Despite the weight of two bodies, the blast of the hurricane shook them in the air.

All at once Felton stopped.

"What is the matter?" asked Milady.

"Silence," said Felton, "I hear footsteps."

"We are discovered!"

There was a silence of several seconds.

"No," said Felton, "it is nothing."

"But what, then, is the noise?"

"That of the patrol going their rounds."

"Where is their road?"

"Just under us."

"They will discover us!"

"No, if it does not lighten."

"But they will run against the bottom of the ladder."

"Fortunately it is too short by six feet."

"Here they are! My God!"

"Silence!"



Escape of Milady

Both remained suspended, motionless and breathless, within twenty paces of the ground, while the patrol passed beneath them laughing and talking. This was a terrible moment for the fugitives.

The patrol passed. The noise of their retreating footsteps and the murmur of their voices soon died away.

"Now," said Felton, "we are safe."

Milady breathed a deep sigh and fainted.

Felton continued to descend. Near the bottom of the ladder, when he found no more support for his feet, he clung with his hands; at length, arrived at the last step, he let himself hang by the strength of his wrists, and touched the ground. He stooped down, picked up the bag of money, and placed it between his teeth. Then he took Milady in his arms, and set off briskly in the direction opposite to that which the patrol had taken. He soon left the pathway of the patrol, descended across the rocks, and when arrived on the edge of the sea, whistled.

A similar signal replied to him; and five minutes after, a boat appeared, rowed by four men.

The boat approached as near as it could to the shore; but there was not depth enough of water for it to touch land. Felton walked into the sea up to his middle, being unwilling to trust his precious burden to anybody.

Fortunately the storm began to subside, but still the sea was disturbed. The little boat bounded over the waves like a nutshell.

"To the sloop," said Felton, "and row quickly."

The four men bent to their oars, but the sea was too high to let them get much hold of it.

However, they left the castle behind; that was the principal thing. The night was extremely dark. It was almost impossible to see the shore from the boat; they would therefore be less likely to see the boat from the shore.

A black point floated on the sea. That was the sloop. While the boat was advancing with all the speed its four rowers could give it, Felton untied the cord and then the handkerchief which bound Milady's hands together. When her hands were loosed he took some sea-water and sprinkled it over her face.

Milady breathed a sigh, and opened her eyes.

"Where am I?" said she.

"Saved!" replied the young officer.

"Oh, saved, saved!" cried she. "Yes, there is the sky; here is the sea! The air I breathe is the air of liberty! Ah, thanks, Felton, thanks!"

The young man pressed her to his heart.

"But what is the matter with my hands?" asked Milady; "it seems as if my wrists had been crushed in a vice."

Milady held out her arms; her wrists were bruised.

"Alas!" said Felton, looking at those beautiful hands, and shaking his head sorrowfully.

"Oh, it's nothing, nothing!" cried Milady. "I remember now."

Milady looked around her, as if in search of something.

"It is there," said Felton, touching the bag of money with his foot.

They drew near to the sloop. A sailor on watch hailed the boat; the boat replied.

"What vessel is that?" asked Milady.

"The one I have hired for you."

"Where will it take me?"

"Where you please, after you have put me on shore at Portsmouth."

"What are you going to do at Portsmouth?" asked Milady.

"Accomplish the orders of Lord de Winter," said Felton, with a gloomy smile.

"What orders?" asked Milady.

"You do not understand?" asked Felton.

"No; explain yourself, I beg."

"As he mistrusted me, he determined to guard you himself, and sent me in his place to get Buckingham to sign the order for your transportation."

"But if he mistrusted you, how could he confide such an order to you?"

"How could I be supposed to know what I was the bearer of?"

"That's true! And you are going to Portsmouth?"

"I have no time to lose. To-morrow is the twenty-third, and Buckingham sets sail to-morrow with his fleet."

"He sets sail to-morrow! Where for?"

"For Rochelle."

"He need not sail!" cried Milady, forgetting her usual presence of mind.

"Be satisfied," replied Felton; "he will not sail."

Milady started with joy. She could read to the depths of the heart of this young man; the death of Buckingham was written there at full length.

"Felton," cried she, "you are as great as Judas Maccabeus! If you die, I will die with you; that is all I can say to you."

"Silence!" cried Felton; "we are here."

In fact, they touched the sloop.

Felton mounted the ladder first, and gave his hand to Milady, while the sailors supported her, for the sea was still much agitated.

An instant after they were on the deck.

"Captain," said Felton, "this is the person of whom I spoke to you, and whom you must convey safe and sound to France."

"For a thousand pistoles," said the captain.

"I have paid you five hundred of them."

"That's correct," said the captain.

"And here are the other five hundred," replied Milady, placing her hand upon the bag of gold.

"No," said the captain, "I make but one bargain; and I have agreed with this young man that the other five hundred shall not be due to me till we arrive at Boulogne."

"And shall we arrive there?"

"Safe and sound," said the captain; "as true as my name's Jack Butler."

"Well," said Milady, "if you keep your word, instead of five hundred, I will give you a thousand pistoles."

"Hurrah for you, then, my beautiful lady," cried the captain; "and may God often send me such passengers as your Ladyship!"

"Meanwhile," said Felton, "convey me to the little bay of —; you know it was agreed you should put in there."

The captain replied by ordering the necessary manœuvres, and towards seven o'clock in the morning the little vessel cast anchor in the bay that had been named.

During this passage, Felton related everything to Milady, — how, instead of going to London, he had chartered the little vessel; how he had returned; how he had scaled the wall by fastening cramps in the interstices of the stones as he ascended, to give him foothold; and how, when he had reached the bars, he fastened his ladder. Milady knew the rest.

On her side, Milady tried to encourage Felton in his project; but at the first words which issued from her mouth, she plainly saw that the young fanatic stood more in need of being moderated than urged.

It was agreed that Milady should wait for Felton till ten o'clock ; if he did not return by ten o'clock she was to sail.

In that case, and supposing he was at liberty, he was to rejoin her in France, at the convent of the Carmelites at Béthune.

CHAPTER XXIX.

WHAT TOOK PLACE AT PORTSMOUTH AUG. 23, 1628.

FELTON took leave of Milady as a brother about to go for a mere walk takes leave of his sister, kissing her hand.

His whole body appeared in its ordinary state of calmness, only an unusual fire beamed from his eyes, like the effects of a fever ; his brow was more pale than it generally was ; his teeth were clenched, and his speech had a short dry accent which indicated that something dark was at work within him.

As long as he remained in the boat which conveyed him to land, he kept his face towards Milady, who, standing on the deck, followed him with her eyes. Both were free from the fear of pursuit ; nobody ever came into Milady's apartment before nine o'clock, and it would require three hours to go from the castle to London.

Felton jumped on shore, climbed the little ascent which led to the top of the cliff, saluted Milady a last time, and took his course towards the city.

At the end of a hundred paces, the ground began to decline, and he could only see the mast of the sloop.

He immediately ran in the direction of Portsmouth, which he saw at nearly half a league before him, standing out in the haze of the morning, with its houses and towers.

Beyond Portsmouth the sea was covered with vessels whose masts, like a forest of poplars despoiled by the winter, bent with each breath of the wind.

Felton, in his rapid walk, reviewed in his mind all the

accusations against the favorite of James I. and Charles I., furnished by two years of premature meditation and a long sojourn among the Puritans.

When he compared the public crimes of this minister — startling crimes, European crimes, if so we may say — with the private and unknown crimes with which Milady had charged him, Felton found that the more culpable of the two men which formed the character of Buckingham was the one of whom the public knew not the life. This was because his love, so strange, so new, and so ardent, made him view the infamous and imaginary accusations of Milady de Winter as, through a magnifying-glass, one views as frightful monsters atoms in reality imperceptible by the side of an ant.

The rapidity of his walk heated his blood still more; the idea that he left behind him, exposed to a frightful vengeance, the woman he loved, or rather whom he adored as a saint, the emotion he had experienced, present fatigue, — all together exalted his mind above human feeling.

He entered Portsmouth about eight o'clock in the morning. The whole population was on foot; drums were beating in the streets and in the port; the troops about to embark were marching towards the sea.

Felton arrived at the palace of the Admiralty, covered with dust, and streaming with perspiration. His countenance, usually so pale, was purple with heat and passion. The sentinel wanted to repulse him; but Felton called to the officer of the post, and drawing from his pocket the letter of which he was the bearer, he said, "A pressing message from Lord de Winter."

At the name of Lord de Winter, who was known to be one of his Grace's most intimate friends, the officer of the post gave orders to let Felton pass, who, besides, wore the uniform of a naval officer.

Felton darted into the palace.

At the moment he entered the vestibule, another man was entering likewise, dusty, out of breath, leaving at the gate a posthorse, which, on reaching the place, tumbled on his fore knees.

Felton and he addressed Patrick, the duke's confidential lackey, at the same moment. Felton named Lord de Winter; the unknown would not name anybody, and pretended that it was to the duke alone he would make himself known. Each was anxious to gain admission before the other.

Patrick, who knew Lord de Winter was in affairs of the service, and in relations of friendship with the duke, gave the preference to the one who came in his name. The other was forced to wait, and it was easily to be seen how he cursed the delay.

The valet led Felton through a large hall in which waited the deputies from Rochelle, headed by the Prince de Soubise, and introduced him into a closet where Buckingham, just out of the bath, was finishing his toilet, upon which, as at all times, he bestowed extraordinary attention.

"Lieutenant Felton, from Lord de Winter," said Patrick.

"From Lord de Winter!" repeated Buckingham; "let him come in."

Felton entered. At that moment Buckingham was throwing upon a couch a rich toilet-robe, worked with gold, in order to put on a blue velvet doublet embroidered with pearls.

"Why did n't the baron come himself?" demanded Buckingham. "I expected him this morning."

"He desired me to tell your Grace," replied Felton, "that he very much regretted not having that honor, but

that he was prevented by the guard he is obliged to keep at the castle."

"Yes, I know that," said Buckingham; "he has a prisoner."

"It is of that prisoner I wish to speak to your Grace," replied Felton.

"Well, then, speak!"

"That which I have to say of her can only be heard by yourself, my Lord!"

"Leave us, Patrick," said Buckingham; "but remain within sound of the bell. I shall call you presently."

Patrick went out.

"We are alone, sir," said Buckingham; "speak!"

"My Lord," said Felton, "the Baron de Winter wrote to you the other day to request you to sign an order of embarkation relative to a young woman named Charlotte Backson."

"Yes, sir; and I answered him, to bring or send me that order and I would sign it."

"Here it is, my Lord."

"Give it to me," said the duke.

And taking it from Felton, he cast a rapid glance over the paper, and perceiving that it was the one that had been mentioned to him, he placed it on the table, took a pen, and prepared to sign it.

"Pardon, my Lord," said Felton, stopping the duke; "but does your Grace know that the name of Charlotte Backson is not the true name of this young woman?"

"Yes, sir, I know it," replied the duke, dipping the quill in the ink.

"Then your Grace knows her real name?" asked Felton, in a sharp tone.

"I know it;" and the duke put the quill to the paper. Felton grew pale.

"And knowing that real name, my Lord," replied Felton, "will you sign it all the same?"

"Doubtless," said Buckingham, "and rather twice than once."

"I cannot believe," continued Felton, in a voice that became more sharp and rough, "that your Grace knows that it is to Milady de Winter this relates."

"I know it perfectly, although I am astonished that you know it."

"And will your Grace sign that order without remorse?"

Buckingham looked at the young man haughtily.

"Do you know, sir, that you are asking me very strange questions, and that I am very foolish to answer them?"

"Reply to them, my Lord," said Felton; "the circumstances are more serious than you perhaps believe."

Buckingham reflected that the young man, coming from Lord de Winter, undoubtedly spoke in his name, and softened.

"Without remorse," said he. "The baron knows, as well as myself, that Milady de Winter is a very guilty woman, and it is treating her very favorably to commute her punishment to transportation."

The duke put his pen to the paper.

"You will not sign that order, my Lord!" said Felton, making a step towards the duke.

"I will not sign ~~this~~ order!" said Buckingham, "and why not?"

"Because you will look into yourself, and you will do justice to the lady."

"I should do her justice by sending her to Tyburn," said Buckingham. "This lady is infamous."

"My Lord, Milady de Winter is an angel; you know that she is, and I demand her liberty of you."

“Bah! Are you mad, to talk to me thus?” said Buckingham.

“My Lord, excuse me! I speak as I can; I restrain myself. But, my Lord, think of what you are about to do, and beware of going too far!”

“What do you say? God pardon me!” cried Buckingham, “I really think he threatens me!”

“No, my Lord, I still plead. And I say to you: one drop of water suffices to make the full vase overflow; one slight fault may draw down punishment upon the head spared, despite many crimes.”

“Mr. Felton,” said Buckingham, “you will withdraw, and place yourself at once under arrest.”

“You will hear me to the end, my Lord. You have seduced this young girl; you have outraged, defiled her. Repair your crimes towards her; let her go free, and I will exact nothing else from you.”

“You will exact!” said Buckingham, looking at Felton with astonishment, and dwelling upon each syllable of the three words as he pronounced them.

“My Lord,” continued Felton, becoming more excited as he spoke, — “my Lord, beware! All England is tired of your iniquities; my Lord, you have abused the royal power, which you have almost usurped; my Lord, you are held in horror by God and men. God will punish you hereafter, but I will punish you here!”

“Ah, this is too much!” cried Buckingham, making a step towards the door.

Felton barred his passage.

“I ask it humbly of you, my Lord,” said he; “sign the order for the liberation of Milady de Winter. Remember that she is a woman whom you have dishonored.”

“Withdraw, sir,” said Buckingham; “or I will call my attendant, and have you placed in irons.”

"You shall not call," said Felton, throwing himself between the duke and the bell, placed on a stand incrustated with silver. "Beware, my Lord, you are in the hands of God!"

"In the hands of the Devil, you mean!" cried Buckingham, raising his voice so as to attract the notice of his people, without absolutely shouting.

"Sign my Lord; sign the liberation of Milady de Winter," said Felton, holding out a paper to the duke.

"By force? You are joking? Holloa, Patrick!"

"Sign, my Lord!"

"Never."

"Never?"

"Help!" shouted the duke; and at the same time he sprang towards his sword.

But Felton did not give him time to draw it. He held the knife with which Milady had stabbed herself, open in his bosom; at one bound he was upon the duke.

At that moment Patrick entered the room, crying, "A letter from France, my Lord."

"From France!" cried Buckingham, forgetting everything in thinking from whom that letter came.

Felton took advantage of this moment, and plunged the knife into his side up to the handle.

"Ah, traitor," cried Buckingham, "you have killed me!"

"Murder!" screamed Patrick.

Felton cast his eyes round for means of escape, and seeing the door free, he rushed into the next chamber, in which, as we have said, the deputies from Rochelle were waiting, crossed it as quickly as possible, and rushed towards the staircase; but upon the first step he met Lord de Winter, who, seeing him pale, confused, livid, and stained with blood both on his hands and face, seized him

by the throat, crying, "I knew it! I guessed it! but too late by a minute, unfortunate, unfortunate that I am!"

Felton made no resistance. Lord de Winter placed him in the hands of the guards, who led him, while awaiting further orders, to a little terrace commanding the sea; and then the baron hastened to the duke's chamber.

At the cry uttered by the duke and the scream of Patrick, the man whom Felton had met in the antechamber rushed into the chamber.

He found the duke reclining upon a sofa, with his hand pressed upon the wound.

"Laporte," said the duke, in a dying voice, — "Laporte, do you come from her?"

"Yes, Monseigneur," replied the faithful cloak-bearer of Anne of Austria, "but too late, perhaps."

"Silence, Laporte, you may be overheard. Patrick, let no one enter. Oh, I cannot tell what she says to me! My God, I am dying!"

And the duke swooned.

Meanwhile, Lord de Winter, the deputies, the leaders of the expedition, the officers of Buckingham's household, had all made their way into the chamber. Cries of despair resounded on all sides. The news, which filled the palace with tears and groans, soon became known, and spread itself throughout the city.

The report of a cannon announced that something new and unexpected had taken place.

Lord de Winter tore his hair.

"Too late by a minute!" cried he, — "too late by a minute! Oh, my God, my God! what a misfortune!"

He had been informed at seven o'clock in the morning that a rope ladder floated from one of the windows of the castle; he had hastened to Milady's chamber, had found it empty, the window open, and the bars filed, had re-

membered the verbal caution D'Artagnan had transmitted to him by his messenger, had trembled for the duke, and running to the stable without taking time to have a horse saddled, had jumped upon the first he found, had galloped off like the wind, had alighted below in the courtyard, had ascended the stairs precipitately, and on the top step, as we have said, had encountered Felton.

The duke, however, was not dead. He recovered a little, re-opened his eyes, and hope revived in all hearts.

"Gentlemen," said he, "leave me alone with Patrick and Laporte — ah, is that you, De Winter? You sent me a strange madman this morning! See the state in which he has put me."

"Oh, my Lord!" cried the baron, "I shall never console myself."

"And you would be quite wrong, my dear De Winter," said Buckingham, holding out his hand to him. "I do not know the man who deserves being regretted during the whole life of another man; but leave us, I pray you."

The baron went out sobbing.

There only remained in the closet of the wounded duke Laporte and Patrick. A physician was sought for, but none was yet found.

"You will live, my Lord, you will live!" repeated the faithful servant of Anne of Austria, on his knees before the duke's sofa.

"What has she written to me?" said Buckingham, feebly, streaming with blood, and suppressing his agony to speak of her he loved, — "what has she written to me? Read me her letter."

"Oh, my Lord!" said Laporte.

"Obey, Laporte; do you not see I have no time to lose?"

Laporte broke the seal, and placed the paper before the



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eyes of the duke ; but Buckingham in vain tried to make out the writing.

“Read!” said he, — “read! I cannot see. Read, then! for soon, perhaps, I shall not hear, and I shall die without knowing what she has written to me.”

Laporte made no further objection, and read :—

MY LORD, — By that which, since I have known you, I have suffered by you and for you, I conjure you, if you have any care for my repose, to countermand those great armaments which you are preparing against France, to put an end to a war of which it is publicly said religion is the ostensible cause, and of which, it is generally whispered, your love for me is the concealed cause. This war may not only bring great catastrophes upon England and France, but misfortunes upon you, my Lord, for which I should never console myself.

Be careful of your life, which is menaced, and which will be dear to me from the moment I am not obliged to see an enemy in you.

Your affectionate

ANNE.

Buckingham collected all his remaining strength to listen to the reading of the letter ; then, when it was ended, as if he had met with a bitter disappointment, he asked, “Have you nothing else to say to me by the living voice, Laporte?”

“The queen charged me to tell you to watch over your self, for she had advice that your assassination would be attempted.”

“And is that all,—is that all?” replied Buckingham, impatiently.

“She likewise charged me to tell you that she still loved you.”

“Ah,” said Buckingham, “God be praised! My death, then, will not be to her as the death of a stranger!”

Laporte burst into tears.

"Patrick," said the duke, "bring me the casket in which the diamond studs were kept."

Patrick brought the object desired, which Laporte recognized as having belonged to the queen.

"Now the scent-bag of white satin, on which her cipher is embroidered in pearls."

Patrick again obeyed.

"Here, Laporte," said Buckingham, "these are the only tokens I ever received from her, — this silver casket and these two letters. You will restore them to her Majesty ; and as a last memorial" — he looked round for some valuable object, — "you will add —"

He still sought ; but his eyes, darkened by death, encountered only the knife which had fallen from the hand of Felton, still smoking with the blood spread over its blade.

"And you will add to them this knife," said the duke, pressing the hand of Laporte. He had just strength enough to place the scent-bag at the bottom of the silver casket, and to let the knife fall into it, making a sign to Laporte that he was no longer able to speak ; then, in a last convulsion, which this time he had not the power to combat, he slipped from the sofa to the floor.

Patrick uttered a loud cry.

Buckingham tried to smile a last time ; but death checked his thought, which remained engraven on his brow like a last kiss of love.

At this moment the duke's surgeon arrived, quite terrified ; he was already on board the admiral's ship, where they had been obliged to seek him.

He approached the duke, took his hand, held it for an instant in his own, and letting it fall, "All is useless," said he, "he is dead."

“Dead, dead !” cried Patrick.

At this cry all the crowd re-entered the apartment, and throughout the palace and town there was nothing but consternation and tumult.

As soon as Lord de Winter saw Buckingham was dead, he ran to Felton, whom the soldiers still guarded on the terrace of the palace.

“Wretch !” said he to the young man, who since the death of Buckingham had regained that coolness and self-possession which never after abandoned him, — “wretch ! what have you done ?”

“I have avenged myself !” said he.

“Avenged yourself,” said the baron. “Rather say that you have served as an instrument to that accursed woman ; but I swear to you that this crime shall be her last.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” replied Felton, quietly, “and I am ignorant of whom you are speaking, my Lord. I killed the Duke of Buckingham because he twice refused you yourself to appoint me captain ; I have punished him for his injustice, that is all.”

De Winter, stupefied, looked on while the soldiers bound Felton, and could not tell what to think of such insensibility.

One thing alone, however, threw a shade over the pallid brow of Felton. At every noise he heard, the simple Puritan fancied he recognized the step and voice of Milady coming to throw herself into his arms, to accuse herself, and die with him.

All at once he started. His eyes became fixed upon a point of the sea, commanded by the terrace where he was. With the eagle glance of a sailor he had recognized there, where another would have only seen a gull hovering over the waves, the sail of a sloop which was directed towards the coast of France.

He grew deadly pale, placed his hand upon his heart, which was breaking, and at once perceived all the treachery.

"One last favor, my Lord!" said he to the baron.

"What?" asked his Lordship.

"What o'clock is it?"

The baron drew out his watch. "It wants ten minutes to nine," said he.

Milady had hastened her departure by an hour and a half. As soon as she heard the cannon which announced the fatal event, she had ordered the anchor to be weighed. The vessel was making way under a blue sky, at a great distance from the coast.

"God has so willed it!" said he, with the resignation of a fanatic; but without, however, being able to take his eyes from that ship, on board of which he doubtless fancied he could distinguish the white outline of her to whom he had sacrificed his life.

De Winter followed his look, observed his feelings, and guessed all.

"Be punished *alone*, for the first, miserable man!" said Lord de Winter to Felton, who was being dragged away with his eyes turned towards the sea; "but I swear to you by the memory of my brother whom I loved so much that your accomplice is not saved."

Felton lowered his head without pronouncing a syllable.

As to Lord de Winter, he descended the stairs rapidly, and went straight to the port.

CHAPTER XXX.

IN FRANCE.

THE first fear of the King of England, Charles I., on learning the death of the duke, was that such terrible news might discourage the Rochellais; he tried, says Richelieu in his Memoirs, to conceal it from them as long as possible, closing all the ports of his kingdom, and carefully keeping watch that no vessel should sail until the army which Buckingham was getting together had gone, taking upon himself, in default of Buckingham, to superintend the departure.

He carried the strictness of this order so far as to detain in England the ambassadors of Denmark, who had taken their leave, and the regular ambassador of Holland, who was to take back to the port of Flushing the Indian merchantmen of which Charles I. had made restitution to the United Provinces.

But as he did not think of giving this order till five hours after the event, — that is to say, till two o'clock in the afternoon, — two vessels had already left the port, the one bearing, as we know, Milady, who, already anticipating the event, was further confirmed in that belief by seeing the black flag flying at the mast-head of the admiral's ship.

As to the second vessel, we will tell hereafter whom it carried, and how it set sail.

During this time nothing new occurred in the camp at Rochelle; only the king, who was bored, as always, but perhaps a little more so in camp than elsewhere, resolved

to go incognito and spend the festival of St. Louis at St. Germain, and asked the cardinal to order him an escort of only twenty musketeers. The cardinal, who sometimes became weary of the king, granted this leave of absence with great pleasure to his royal lieutenant, who promised to return about the 15th of September.

M. de Tréville, being informed of this by his Eminence, packed his portmanteau; and as without knowing the cause he knew the great desire and even imperative need which his friends had of returning to Paris, it goes without saying that he fixed upon them to form part of the escort.

The four young men heard the news a quarter of an hour after M. de Tréville, for they were the first to whom he communicated it. It was then that D'Artagnan appreciated the favor the cardinal had conferred upon him in making him at last enter the Musketeers, — for without that circumstance he would have been forced to remain in the camp while his companions left it.

It goes without saying that this impatience to return towards Paris had for a cause the danger which Madame Bonacieux would run of meeting at the convent of Béthune with Milady, her mortal enemy. Aramis therefore had written immediately to Marie Michon, the seamstress at Tours who had such fine acquaintances, to obtain from the queen authority for Madame Bonacieux to leave the convent, and to retire either into Lorraine or Belgium. They had not long to wait for an answer. Eight or ten days afterwards Aramis received the following letter: —

MY DEAR COUSIN, — Here is the authorization from my sister to withdraw our little servant from the convent of Béthune, the air of which you think is bad for her. My sister sends you this authorization with great pleasure, for she is

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very partial to the little girl, to whom she intends to be more serviceable hereafter.

I salute you,

MARIE MICHON.

To this letter was added an order, conceived in these terms : —

At the Louvre, Aug. 10, 1628.

The superior of the convent of Béthune will place in the hands of the person who shall present this note to her the novice who entered the convent upon my recommendation and under my patronage.

ANNE.

It may be easily imagined how the relationship between Aramis and a seamstress who called the queen her sister amused the young men ; but Aramis, after having blushed two or three times up to the whites of his eyes at the gross pleasantry of Porthos, begged his friends not to revert to the subject again, declaring that if a single word more was said to him about it, he would never again implore his cousin to interfere in such affairs.

There was no further question, therefore, about Marie Michon among the four musketeers, who besides had what they wanted : that was, the order to withdraw Madame Bonacieux from the convent of the Carmelites of Béthune. It was true that this order would not be of great use to them while they were in camp at Rochelle ; that is to say, at the other end of France. Therefore D'Artagnan was going to ask leave of absence of M. de Tréville, confiding to him candidly the importance of his departure, when the news was transmitted to him as well as to his three friends that the king was about to set out for Paris with an escort of twenty musketeers, and that they formed part of the escort.

Their joy was great. The lackeys were sent on before

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with the baggage, and they set out on the morning of the sixteenth.

The cardinal accompanied his Majesty from Surgères to Mauzes ; and there the king and his minister took leave of each other with great demonstrations of friendship.

The king, however, who sought distraction, while travelling as fast as possible, — for he was anxious to be in Paris by the twenty-third, — stopped from time to time to fly the magpie, a pastime for which the taste had been formerly inspired in him by De Luynes, and for which he had always preserved a great predilection. Out of the twenty musketeers sixteen, when this took place, rejoiced greatly at this relaxation ; but the other four cursed it heartily. D'Artagnan, in particular, had a perpetual buzzing in his ears, which Porthos explained thus : “ A very great lady has told me that this means that somebody is talking of you somewhere.”

At length the escort passed through Paris on the twenty-third, in the night. The king thanked M. de Tréville, and permitted him to distribute furloughs for four days, on condition that the favored parties should not appear in any public place, under penalty of the Bastille.

The first four furloughs granted, as may be imagined, were to our four friends. Still further, Athos obtained of M. de Tréville six days instead of four, and introduced into these six days two more nights, — for they set out on the twenty-fourth at five o'clock in the evening ; and as a further kindness M. de Tréville postdated the leave to the morning of the twenty-fifth.

“ Good Lord ! ” said D'Artagnan, who, as we have often said, never stumbled at anything. “ It appears to me that we are making a great trouble of a very simple thing. In two days, and by using up two or three horses (that's

nothing ; I have plenty of money), I am at Béthune. I present my letter from the queen to the superior, and I bring back the dear treasure I go to seek, — not into Lorraine, not into Belgium, but to Paris, where she will be much better concealed, particularly while the cardinal is at Rochelle. Well, once returned from the country, half by the protection of her cousin, half through what we have personally done for her, we shall obtain from the queen what we desire. Remain, then, where you are, and do not exhaust yourselves with useless fatigue. Myself and Planchet are all that such a simple expedition requires.”

To this Athos replied quietly : “We also have money left, — for I have not yet drunk all my share of the diamond, and Porthos and Aramis have not eaten all theirs. We can therefore use up four horses as well as one. But consider, D’Artagnan,” added he, in a tone so solemn that it made the young man shudder, — “consider that Béthune is a city where the cardinal has given rendezvous to a woman who, wherever she goes, brings misery with her. If you had only to deal with four men, D’Artagnan, I would allow you to go alone. You have to do with that woman ! We four will go ; and I hope to God that with our four lackeys we may be in sufficient number.”

“You terrify me, Athos !” cried D’Artagnan. “My God ! what do you fear ?”

“Everything !” replied Athos.

D’Artagnan examined the countenances of his companions, which, like that of Athos, wore an impression of deep anxiety ; and they continued their route as fast as their horses could carry them, but without adding another word.

On the evening of the twenty-fifth, as they were entering Arras, and as D’Artagnan was dismounting at the inn

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of the Golden Harrow to drink a glass of wine, a horseman came out of the postyard, where he had just had a relay, started off at a gallop, and with a fresh horse took the road to Paris. At the moment he passed through the gateway into the street, the wind blew open the cloak in which he was wrapped, although it was in the month of August, and lifted his hat, which the traveller seized with his hand the moment it had left his head, pulling it eagerly over his eyes.

D'Artagnan, who had his eyes fixed upon this man, became very pale, and let his glass fall.

"What is the matter, Monsieur?" said Planchet. "Oh, come, gentlemen, my master is ill!"

The three friends hastened towards D'Artagnan, who, instead of being ill, ran towards his horse. They stopped him at the door.

"Well, where the devil are you going now?" cried Athos.

"It is he!" cried D'Artagnan, pale with anger, and with the sweat on his brow,—"it is he! let me overtake him!"

"He? What he?" asked Athos.

"He, that man!"

"What man?"

"That cursed man, my evil genius, whom I have always met with when threatened by some misfortune,—he who accompanied that horrible woman when I met her for the first time, he whom I was seeking when I offended our Athos, he whom I saw on the very morning Madame Bonacieux was abducted. I have seen him; that is he! I recognized him when the wind blew open his cloak."

"The devil!" said Athos, musingly.

"To saddle, gentlemen! to saddle! Let us pursue him, and we shall overtake him!"

"My dear friend," said Aramis, "remember that he goes

in an opposite direction from that in which we are going, that he has a fresh horse, and ours are fatigued, so that we shall disable our own horses without even a chance of overtaking him. Let the man go, D'Artagnan; let us save the woman."

"Monsieur, Monsieur!" cried a hostler, running out and looking after the unknown, — "Monsieur, here is a paper which dropped out of your hat! Eh, Monsieur, eh!"

"Friend," said D'Artagnan, "a half-pistole for that paper!"

"My faith, Monsieur, with great pleasure! Here it is!"

The hostler, enchanted with the good day's work he had done, returned to the yard. D'Artagnan unfolded the paper.

"Well?" eagerly demanded all his three friends.

"Nothing but one word!" said D'Artagnan.

"Yes," said Aramis, "but that one word is the name of some town or village."

"*Armentières*," read Porthos; "*Armentières*? I don't know such a place."

"And that name of a town or village is written in her hand!" cried Athos.

"Come on, come on!" said D'Artagnan; "let us keep that paper carefully, perhaps I have not thrown away my half-pistole. To horse, my friends, to horse!"

And the four friends flew at a gallop along the road to Béthune.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE CARMELITE CONVENT AT BÉTHUNE.

GREAT criminals bear about them a kind of predestination which makes them surmount all obstacles, which makes them escape all dangers, up to the moment which a wearied Providence has marked as the rock of their impious fortunes.

It was thus with Milady. She escaped the cruisers of both nations, and arrived at Boulogne without accident.

When landing at Portsmouth, Milady was an Englishwoman whom the persecutions of the French drove from Rochelle ; when landing at Boulogne, after a two days' passage, she passed for a Frenchwoman whom the English persecuted at Portsmouth out of their hatred for France.

Milady had, likewise, the best of passports,—her beauty, her noble appearance, and the liberality with which she distributed her pistoles. Freed from the usual formalities by the affable smile and gallant manners of an old governor of the port, who kissed her hand, she only remained long enough at Boulogne to put into the post a letter, conceived in the following terms : —

To his Eminence Monseigneur the Cardinal Richelieu, in his camp before Rochelle.

MONSEIGNEUR, — Let your Eminence be re-assured. His Grace the Duke of Buckingham *will not set out* for France.

MILADY DE —

BOULOGNE, evening of the 25th.

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P. S. — According to the desire of your Eminence, I report at the convent of the Carmelites at Béthune, where I will await your orders.

Accordingly, that same evening Milady commenced her journey. Night overtook her ; she stopped, and slept at an inn. At five o'clock the next morning she again proceeded, and in three hours after entered Béthune.

She inquired for the convent of the Carmelites, and went thither immediately.

The superior met her ; Milady showed her the cardinal's order. The abbess assigned her a chamber, and had breakfast served.

All the past was effaced from the eyes of this woman ; and her looks, fixed on the future, beheld nothing but the high fortunes reserved for her by the cardinal, whom she had so successfully served without his name being in any way mixed up with the sanguinary affair. The ever-new passions which consumed her gave to her life the appearance of those clouds which float in the heavens, reflecting sometimes azure, sometimes fire, sometimes the opaque blackness of the tempest, and which leave no traces upon the earth behind them but devastation and death.

After breakfast, the abbess came to pay her a visit. There is very little amusement in the cloister, and the good superior was eager to make the acquaintance of her new boarder.

Milady wished to please the abbess. This was a very easy matter for a woman so really superior as she was. She tried to be agreeable, and she was charming, winning the good superior by her varied conversation and by the graces of her whole personality.

The abbess, who was the daughter of a noble house, took particular delight in histories of the court, which so

seldom travel to the extremities of the kingdom, and which, above all, have so much difficulty in penetrating the walls of convents, at whose threshold the noise of the world dies away.

Milady, on the contrary, was quite conversant with all aristocratic intrigues, amid which she had constantly lived for five or six years. She made it her business, therefore, to amuse the good abbess with the worldly practices of the court of France, mixed with the eccentric pursuits of the king; she made for her the scandalous chronicle of the lords and ladies of the court, whom the abbess knew perfectly by name, touched lightly on the amours of the queen and the Duke of Buckingham, talking a great deal to induce her auditor to talk a little.

But the abbess contented herself with listening and smiling without replying a word. Milady, however, saw that this sort of narrative amused her very much, and kept at it; only she now let her conversation drift towards the cardinal.

But she was greatly embarrassed. She did not know whether the abbess was a royalist or a cardinalist; she therefore confined herself to a prudent middle course. But the abbess, on her part, maintained a reserve still more prudent, contenting herself with making a profound inclination of the head every time the fair traveller pronounced the name of his Eminence.

Milady began to think she should soon grow weary of a convent life; she resolved, then, to risk something in order that she might know how to act afterwards. Desirous of seeing how far the discretion of the good abbess would go, she began to tell a story, obscure at first, but very circumstantial afterwards, about the cardinal, relating the amours of the minister with Madame d'Aiguillon, Marion de Lorme, and several other gay women.

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The abbess listened more attentively, grew animated by degrees, and smiled.

"Good," thought Milady ; "she takes a pleasure in my conversation. If she is a cardinalist, she has no fanaticism, at least."

She then went on to describe the persecutions exercised by the cardinal upon his enemies. The abbess only crossed herself, without approving or disapproving.

This confirmed Milady in her opinion that the abbess was rather royalist than cardinalist. Milady therefore continued, coloring her narrations more and more.

"I am very ignorant of these matters," said the abbess, at length ; "but however distant from the court we may be, however remote from the interests of the world we may be placed, we have very sad examples of what you have related. And one of our boarders has suffered much from the vengeance and persecution of the cardinal."

"One of your boarders ?" said Milady ; "oh, my God ! Poor woman ! I pity her, then."

"And you have reason, for she is much to be pitied. Imprisonment, menaces, ill-treatment, — she has suffered everything. But after all," resumed the abbess, "Monsieur Cardinal has perhaps plausible motives for acting thus ; and though she has the look of an angel, we must not always judge people by the appearance."

"Good !" said Milady to herself ; "who knows ! I am about, perhaps, to discover something here ; I am in the vein."

She tried to give her countenance an appearance of perfect candor.

"Alas," said Milady, "I know it is so. It is said that we must not trust to the face ; but in what, then, shall we place confidence, if not in the most beautiful work of the Lord ? As for me, I shall be deceived all my life

perhaps, but I shall always have faith in a person whose countenance inspires me with sympathy."

"You would, then, be tempted to believe," said the abbess, "that this young person is innocent?"

"The cardinal pursues not only crimes," said she; "there are certain virtues which he pursues more severely than certain offences."

"Permit me, Madame, to express my surprise," said the abbess.

"At what?" said Milady, with the utmost ingenuousness.

"At the language you use."

"What do you find so astonishing in that language?" said Milady, smiling.

"You are the friend of the cardinal, for he sends you hither, and yet —"

"And yet I speak ill of him," replied Milady, finishing the thought of the superior.

"At least you don't speak well of him."

"That is because I am not his friend," said she, sighing, "but his victim!"

"But this letter in which he recommends you to me?"

"Is an order for me to confine myself to a sort of prison, from which he will release me by one of his satellites."

"But why have you not fled?"

"Whither should I go? Do you believe there is a spot on the earth which the cardinal cannot reach if he takes the trouble to stretch forth his hand? If I were a man, that would barely be possible; but what can a woman do? This young boarder of yours, has she tried to fly?"

"No, that is true; but she — that is another thing; I believe she is detained in France by some love affair."

"Ah," said Milady, with a sigh, "if she loves she is not altogether wretched."

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"Then," said the abbess, looking at Milady with increasing interest, "I behold another poor victim?"

"Alas, yes," said Milady.

The abbess looked at her for an instant with uneasiness, as if a fresh thought suggested itself to her mind.

"You are not an enemy of our holy faith?" said she, hesitatingly.

"Who, — I?" cried Milady; "I a Protestant? Oh, no! I call to witness the God who hears us, that on the contrary I am a fervent Catholic!"

"Then, Madame," said the abbess, smiling, "be reassured; the house in which you are shall not be a very hard prison, and we will do all in our power to make you cherish your captivity. You will find here, moreover, the young woman of whom I spoke, who is persecuted, no doubt, in consequence of some court intrigue. She is amiable and well-behaved."

"What is her name?"

"She was sent to me by some one of high rank, under the name of Kitty. I have not tried to discover her other name."

"Kitty!" cried Milady. "What? Are you sure?"

"That she is called so? Yes, Madame. Do you know her?"

Milady smiled to herself at the idea which had occurred to her that this might be her old chambermaid. There was connected with the remembrance of this girl a remembrance of anger; and a desire of vengeance disordered the features of Milady, which, however, immediately recovered the calm and benevolent expression which this woman of a hundred faces had for a moment allowed them to lose.

"And when can I see this young lady, for whom I already feel so great a sympathy?" asked Milady.

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“Why, this evening,” said the abbess; “to-day even. But you have been travelling these four days, as you told me yourself. This morning you rose at five o’clock; you must stand in need of repose. Go to bed and sleep; at dinner-time we will rouse you.”

Although Milady would very willingly have gone without sleep, sustained as she was by all the excitements which a new adventure awakened in her heart, ever thirsting for intrigues, she nevertheless accepted the offer of the superior. During the last fifteen days she had experienced so many and such various emotions that if her frame of iron was still capable of supporting fatigue, her mind required repose.

She therefore took leave of the abbess, and went to bed, softly rocked by the ideas of vengeance which the name of Kitty had naturally brought back to her thoughts. She remembered that almost unlimited promise which the cardinal had given her if she succeeded in her enterprise. She had succeeded; D’Artagnan was then in her power!

One thing alone frightened her; that was, the remembrance of her husband, the Comte de la Fère, whom she had believed dead, or at least expatriated, and whom she found again in Athos, — the best friend of D’Artagnan.

But also, if he was the friend of D’Artagnan, he must have lent him his assistance in all the proceedings by whose aid the queen had defeated the projects of his Eminence; if he was the friend of D’Artagnan, he was the enemy of the cardinal; and she doubtless would succeed in involving him in the vengeance by which she hoped to destroy the young musketeer.

All these hopes were so many sweet thoughts for Milady; so, rocked by them, she soon fell asleep.

She was awakened by a soft voice which sounded at the foot of her bed. She opened her eyes, and saw the

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abbess, accompanied by a young woman with light hair and delicate complexion, who fixed upon her a look full of benevolent curiosity.

The face of the young woman was entirely unknown to her. Each examined the other with great attention, while exchanging the customary compliments ; both were very handsome, but of quite different styles of beauty. Milady, however, smiled in observing that she excelled the young woman by far in her high air and aristocratic bearing. It is true that the habit of a novice, which the young woman wore, was not very advantageous in a contest of this kind.

The abbess introduced them to each other. When this formality was ended, as her duties called her to chapel, she left the two young women alone.

The novice, seeing Milady in bed, was about to follow the example of the superior ; but Milady stopped her.

"How, Madame," said she, "I have scarcely seen you, and you already wish to deprive me of your company, upon which I had counted a little, I must confess, for the time I have to pass here?"

"No, Madame," replied the novice, "only I thought I had chosen my time ill ; you were asleep, you are fatigued."

"Well," said Milady, "what can those who sleep wish for, — a happy awakening? This awakening you have given me ; allow me then to enjoy it at my ease," and taking her hand, she drew her towards the armchair by the bedside.

The novice sat down.

"How unfortunate I am!" said she ; "I have been here six months without the shadow of recreation. You arrive, and your presence was likely to afford me delightful company ; yet I expect, in all probability, to quit the convent at any moment."

"How, you are going soon?" asked Milady.

"At least I hope so," said the novice, with an expression of joy which she made no effort to disguise.

"I think I learned you had suffered persecutions from the cardinal," continued Milady; "that would have been another motive for sympathy between us."

"What I have heard, then, from our good mother is true; you have likewise been a victim of that wicked priest?"

"Hush!" said Milady; "let us not, even here, speak thus of him. All my misfortunes arise from my having said nearly what you have said before a woman whom I thought my friend, and who betrayed me. Are you also the victim of a treachery?"

"No," said the novice, "but of my devotion, — of a devotion to a woman I loved, for whom I would have laid down my life, for whom I would give it still."

"And who has abandoned you, — is that it?"

"I have been sufficiently unjust to believe so; but during the last two or three days I have obtained proof to the contrary, for which I thank God, — for it would have cost me very dear to think she had forgotten me. But you, Madame, you appear to be free," continued the novice; "and if you were inclined to fly it only rests with yourself to do so."

"Whither would you have me go, without friends, without money, in a part of France with which I am unacquainted, and where I have never been before?"

"Oh," cried the novice, "as to friends, you would have them wherever you went, you appear so good and are so beautiful!"

"That does not prevent," replied Milady, softening her smile so as to give it an angelic expression, "my being alone or being persecuted."

"Hear me," said the novice; "we must trust in Heaven. There always comes a moment when the good you have done pleads your cause before God; and see, perhaps it is a happiness for you, humble and powerless as I am, that you have met with me, for if I leave this place, well — I have powerful friends, who, after having exerted themselves on my account, may also exert themselves for you."

"Oh, when I said I was alone," said Milady, hoping to make the novice talk by talking of herself, "it is not for want of friends in high places; but these friends themselves tremble before the cardinal. The queen herself does not dare to oppose the terrible minister. I have proof that her Majesty, notwithstanding her excellent heart, has more than once been obliged to abandon to the anger of his Eminence persons who had served her."

"Trust me, Madame; the queen may appear to have abandoned those persons, but we must not put faith in appearances. The more they are persecuted, the more she thinks of them; and often, when they least expect it, they have proofs of a kind remembrance."

"Alas!" said Milady, "I believe so; the queen is so good!"

"Oh, you know her, then, that lovely and noble queen, that you speak of her thus!" cried the novice, with enthusiasm.

"That is to say," replied Milady, driven into her intrenchments, "that I have not the honor of knowing her personally; but I know a great number of her most intimate friends. I am acquainted with M. de Putange; I met M. Dujart in England; I know M. de Tréville."

"M. de Tréville!" exclaimed the novice, "do you know M. de Tréville?"

"Yes, perfectly well, — intimately even."

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"The captain of the king's Musketeers?"

"The captain of the king's Musketeers."

"Why, then, only see!" cried the novice, "we shall soon be well acquainted, almost friends. If you know M. de Tréville, you must have visited him?"

"Often!" said Milady, who, having entered this track, and perceiving that falsehood succeeded, was determined to follow it to the end.

"With him, then, you must have seen some of his musketeers?"

"All those he is in the habit of receiving!" replied Milady, for whom this conversation began to have a real interest.

"Name a few of those whom you know, and you will see if they are my friends."

"Well!" said Milady, embarrassed, "I know M. de Louvigny, M. de Courtivron, M. de Féruissac."

The novice let her speak, then seeing that she paused, she said, "Don't you know a gentleman named Athos?"

Milady became as pale as the sheets in which she was lying, and mistress as she was of herself, could not help uttering a cry, seizing the hand of the novice, and devouring her with looks.

"What is the matter? Good God!" asked the poor woman, "have I said anything that has wounded you?"

"No; but the name struck me, because I also have known that gentleman, and it appeared strange to me to meet with a person who appears to know him well."

"Oh, yes, very well; not only him, but some of his friends, MM. Porthos and Aramis!"

"Indeed! you know them likewise? I know them," cried Milady, who began to feel a chill penetrate her heart.

"Well, if you know them, you know that they are good

and free companions. Why do you not apply to them, if you stand in need of help?"

"That is to say," stammered Milady, "I am not really very intimate with any of them. I know them from having heard one of their friends, M. d'Artagnan, say a great deal about them."

"You know M. d'Artagnan!" cried the novice, in her turn seizing the hands of Milady and devouring her with her eyes.

Then remarking the strange expression of Milady's countenance, she said, "Pardon me, Madame; you know him by what title?"

"Why," replied Milady, embarrassed, — "why, by the title of friend."

"You deceive me, Madame," said the novice; "you have been his mistress!"

"It is you who have been his mistress, Madame!" cried Milady, in her turn.

"I?" said the novice.

"Yes, you! I know you now. You are Madame Bonacieux!"

The young woman drew back, filled with surprise and terror.

"Oh, do not deny it! Answer!" continued Milady.

"Well, yes, Madame," said the novice. "Are we rivals?"

The countenance of Milady was illumined by so savage a joy that under any other circumstances Madame Bonacieux would have fled in terror; but she was absorbed by jealousy.

"Speak, Madame!" resumed Madame Bonacieux, with an energy of which she might not have been believed capable. "Have you been, or are you, his mistress?"

"Oh, no!" cried Milady, with an accent that admitted no doubt of her truth. "Never, never!"

"I believe you," said Madame Bonacieux; "but why, then, did you cry out so?"

"Do you not understand?" said Milady, who had already overcome her agitation and recovered all her presence of mind.

"How can I understand? I know nothing."

"Can you not understand that M. d'Artagnan, being my friend, might take me into his confidence?"

"Truly?"

"Do you not perceive that I know all, — your abduction from the little house at St. Germain, his despair, that of his friends, and their useless inquiries up to this moment? How could I help being astonished when, without having the least expectation of such a thing, I meet you face to face, — you, of whom we have so often spoken together, you whom he loves with all his soul, you whom he had taught me to love before I had seen you! Ah, dear Constance, I have found you, then; I see you at last!"

And Milady stretched out her arms to Madame Bonacieux, who, convinced by what she had just said, saw nothing in this woman whom an instant before she had believed her rival but a sincere and devoted friend.

"Oh, pardon me, pardon me!" cried she, sinking upon the shoulders of Milady. "Pardon me, I love him so much!"

These two women held each other for an instant in a close embrace. Certainly, if Milady's strength had been equal to her hatred, Madame Bonacieux would never have left that embrace alive. But not being able to stifle her, she smiled upon her.

"Oh, you beautiful, good little creature!" said Milady. "How delighted I am to have found you! Let me look

at you!" and while saying these words, she absolutely devoured her by her looks. "Oh, yes, it is you indeed! From what he has told me, I know you now. I recognize you perfectly."

The poor young woman could not possibly suspect what frightful cruelty was behind the rampart of that pure brow, behind those brilliant eyes in which she read nothing but interest and compassion.

"Then you know what I have suffered," said Madame Bonacieux, "since he has told you what he has suffered; but to suffer for him is happiness."

Milady replied mechanically, "Yes, that is happiness." She was thinking of something else.

"And then," continued Madame Bonacieux, "my punishment is drawing to a close. To-morrow, this evening, perhaps, I shall see him again; and then the past will no longer exist."

"This evening?" asked Milady, roused from her reverie by these words. "What do you mean? Do you expect news from him?"

"I expect himself."

"Himself? D'Artagnan here?"

"Himself!"

"But that's impossible! He is at the siege of Rochelle with the cardinal. He will not return till after the taking of the city."

"Ah, you fancy so! But is there anything impossible for my D'Artagnan, the noble and loyal gentleman?"

"Oh, I cannot believe you!"

"Well, read, then!" said the unhappy young woman, in the excess of her pride and joy, presenting a letter to Milady.

"The writing of Madame de Chevreuse!" said Milady to herself. "Ah, I always thought there was some secret

understanding in that quarter!" And she greedily read the following few lines:—

MY DEAR CHILD, — Hold yourself ready. *Our friend* will see you soon, and he will only see you to release you from that imprisonment in which your safety required you should be concealed. Prepare, then, for your departure, and never despair of us.

Our charming Gascon has just proved himself as brave and faithful as ever. Tell him that certain parties are grateful to him for the warning he has given.

"Yes, yes," said Milady; "the letter is precise. Do you know what that warning was?"

"No. I only suspect he has warned the queen against some fresh machinations of the cardinal."

"Yes, that's it, no doubt!" said Milady, returning the letter to Madame Bonacieux, and letting her head sink pensively upon her bosom.

At that moment they heard the gallop of a horse.

"Oh!" cried Madame Bonacieux, darting to the window, "can it be he?"

Milady remained still in bed, petrified by surprise; so many unexpected things happened to her all at once that for the first time she was at a loss.

"He, he!" murmured she; "can it be he?" And she remained in bed with her eyes fixed.

"Alas, no!" said Madame Bonacieux; "it is a man I don't know, although he seems to be coming here. Yes, he checks his pace; he stops at the gate; he rings."

Milady sprang out of bed.

"You are sure it is not he?" said she.

"Yes, yes, very sure!"

"Perhaps you did not see well."

"Oh, if I were to see the plume of his hat, the end of his cloak, I should know *him*!"

Milady was dressing herself all the time.

"Never mind ! The man is coming here, do you say ?"

"Yes, he has entered."

"It is for you or me !"

"My God, how agitated you seem !"

"Yes, I admit it. I have not your confidence ; I fear the cardinal."

"Hush !" said Madame Bonacieux ; "somebody is coming."

Immediately the door opened, and the superior entered.

"Did you come from Boulogne ?" demanded she of Milady.

"Yes," replied she, trying to recover her self-possession.

"Who wants me ?"

"A man who will not tell his name, but who comes from the cardinal."

"And who wishes to speak with me ?" asked Milady.

"Who wishes to speak to a lady recently come from Boulogne."

"Then let him come in, if you please."

"Oh, my God, my God !" cried Madame Bonacieux.

"Can it be bad news ?"

"I fear it."

"I will leave you with this stranger ; but as soon as he is gone, if you will permit me, I will return."

"*Permit* you ? I *beseech* you !"

The superior and Madame Bonacieux retired.

Milady remained alone, with her eyes fixed upon the door. An instant after, the jingling of spurs was heard upon the stairs, steps drew near, the door opened, and a man appeared.

Milady uttered a cry of joy ; this man was the Comte de Rochefort, — the demoniacal tool of his Eminence.

CHAPTER XXXII.

TWO VARIETIES OF DEMONS.

"Ah," cried Milady and Rochefort together, "it is you!"

"Yes, it is I."

"And you come?" asked Milady

"From Rochelle; and you?"

"From England."

"Buckingham?"

"Dead or desperately wounded, as I left without having been able to hear anything of him. A fanatic has just assassinated him."

"Ah," said Rochefort, with a smile; "this is a fortunate chance, — one that will delight his Eminence! Have you informed him of it?"

"I wrote to him from Boulogne. But what brings you here?"

"His Eminence was uneasy, and sent me to find you."

"I only arrived yesterday."

"And what have you been doing since yesterday?"

"I have not lost my time."

"Oh, I don't doubt that."

"Do you know whom I have encountered here?"

"No."

"Guess."

"How can I?"

"That young woman whom the queen took out of prison."

"The mistress of that fellow D'Artagnan?"

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"Yes ; Madame Bonacieux, with whose retreat the cardinal was unacquainted."

"Well, well," said Rochefort, "here is a chance which may pair off with the other ! Monsieur Cardinal is indeed a privileged man !"

"Imagine my astonishment," continued Milady, "when I found myself face to face with this woman ?"

"Does she know you ?"

"No."

"Then she looks upon you as a stranger ?"

Milady smiled. "I am her best friend."

"Upon my honor," said Rochefort, "it takes you, my dear countess, to perform such miracles !"

"And it is well I can, Chevalier," said Milady, "for do you know what is going on here ?"

"No."

"They will come for her to-morrow or the day after, with an order from the queen."

"Indeed ! And who ?"

"D'Artagnan and his friends."

"Indeed, they will go so far that we shall be obliged to send them to the Bastille."

"Why is it not done already ?"

"What would you ? The cardinal has a weakness for these men which I cannot comprehend."

"Indeed !"

"Yes."

"Well, then, tell him this, Rochefort. Tell him that our conversation at the inn of the Red Dovecot was overheard by these four men ; tell him that after his departure one of them came up to me and took from me by violence the safe-conduct which he had given me ; tell him they warned Lord de Winter of my journey to England ; that this time they nearly foiled my mission as

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they foiled the affair of the studs ; tell him that among these four men two only are to be feared, — D'Artagnan and Athos ; tell him that the third, Aramis, is the lover of Madame de Chevreuse, — he may be left alone, we know his secret, and it may be useful ; as to the fourth, Porthos, he is a fool, a simpleton, a blustering booby, not worth troubling himself about."

"But these four men must be now at the siege of Rochelle?"

"I thought so too ; but a letter which Madame Bonacieux has received from Madame the Constable, and which she has had the imprudence to show me, leads me to believe that these four men, on the contrary, are on the road hither to take her away."

"The devil ! What's to be done?"

"What did the cardinal say about me?"

"I was to take your despatches, written or verbal, and return by post ; and when he shall know what you have done, he will advise what you have to do."

"I must, then, remain here?"

"Here, or in the neighborhood."

"You cannot take me with you?"

"No ; the order is imperative. Near the camp you might be recognized ; and your presence, you must be aware, would compromise the cardinal."

"Then I must wait here, or in the neighborhood?"

"Only tell me beforehand where you will wait for intelligence from the cardinal ; let me know always where to find you."

"Observe, it is probable I may not be able to remain here."

"Why?"

"You forget that my enemies may arrive at any minute."

TWO VARIETIES OF DEMONS.

"That's true; but is this little woman, then, to escape his Eminence?"

"Bah!" said Milady, with a smile that belonged only to herself; "you forget that I am her best friend."

"Ah, that's true! I may then tell the cardinal, with respect to this little woman —"

"That he may be at ease."

"Is that all?"

"He will know what that means."

"He will guess, at least. Now, then, what had I better do?"

"Return instantly. It appears to me that the news you bear is worth the trouble of a little diligence."

"My chaise broke down coming into Lilliers."

"Capital!"

"What, *capital*?"

"Yes; I want your chaise."

"And how shall I travel, then?"

"On horseback."

"You talk very comfortably, — a hundred and eighty leagues!"

"What's that?"

"One can do it! Afterwards?"

"Afterwards? Why, in passing through Lilliers you will send me your chaise, with an order to your servant to place himself at my disposal."

"Well."

"You have, no doubt, some order from the cardinal about you?"

"I have my *full power*."

"Show it to the abbess, and tell her that some one will come and fetch me, either to-day or to-morrow, and that I am to follow the person who presents himself in your name."

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"Very well."

"Don't forget to treat me harshly in speaking of me to the abbess."

"To what purpose?"

"I am a victim of the cardinal. It is necessary to inspire confidence in that poor little Madame Bonacieux."

"That's true. Now, will you make me a report of all that has happened?"

"Why, I have related the events to you. You have a good memory; repeat what I have told you. A paper may be lost."

"You are right; only let me know where to find you that I may not run needlessly about the neighborhood."

"That's correct; wait!"

"Do you want a map?"

"Oh, I know this country marvellously!"

"You? When were you here?"

"I was brought up here."

"Truly?"

"It is worth something, you see, to have been brought up somewhere."

"You will wait for me, then?"

"Let me reflect a little! Ay, that will do, — at Armentières."

"Where is that Armentières?"

"A little town on the Lys; I shall only have to cross the river, and I shall be in a foreign country."

"Capital! but it is understood you will only cross the river in case of danger."

"That is well understood."

"And in that case, how shall I know where you are?"

"You do not want your lackey?"

"No."

"Is he a sure man?"

TWO VARIETIES OF DEMONS.

"To the proof."

"Give him to me. Nobody knows him. I will leave him at the place I quit, and he will conduct you to me."

"And you say you will wait for me at Armentières?"

"At Armentières."

"Write that name on a bit of paper, lest I should forget it. There is nothing compromising in the name of a town. Is it not so?"

"Eh, who knows? Never mind," said Milady, writing the name on half a sheet of paper; "I will compromise myself."

"Well," said Rochefort, taking the paper from Milady, folding it, and placing it in the lining of his hat, "you may be easy. I will do as children do, for fear of losing the paper, — repeat the name along the route. Now, is that all?"

"I believe so."

"Let us see: Buckingham dead or grievously wounded; your conversation with the cardinal overheard by the four musketeers; Lord de Winter warned of your arrival at Portsmouth; D'Artagnan and Athos to the Bastille; Aramis the lover of Madame de Chevreuse; Porthos an ass; Madame Bonacieux found again; to send you the chaise as soon as possible; to place my lackey at your disposal; to make you out a victim of the cardinal in order that the abbess may entertain no suspicion; Armentières, on the banks of the Lys. Is that all, then?"

"In truth, my dear chevalier, you are a miracle of memory. *À propos*, add one thing —"

"What?"

"I saw some very pretty woods which almost touch the convent garden. Say that I am permitted to walk in those woods. Who knows? Perhaps I shall stand in need of a back-door for retreat."

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"You think of everything."

"And you forget one thing."

"What?"

"To ask me if I want money."

"That's true. How much do you want?"

"All you have in gold."

"I have five hundred pistoles, or thereabouts."

"I have as much. With a thousand pistoles one may face everything. Empty your pockets."

"There."

"Right. And you go —"

"In an hour, — time to eat a morsel, during which I shall send for a posthorse."

"Capital! Adieu, Chevalier."

"Adieu, Countess."

"Commend me to the cardinal."

"Commend me to Satan."

Milady and Rochefort exchanged a smile and separated. An hour afterwards Rochefort set out at a grand gallop; five hours after that he passed through Arras.

Our readers already know how he was recognized by D'Artagnan, and how that recognition by inspiring fear in the four musketeers had given fresh activity to their journey.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DROP OF WATER.

ROCHEFORT had scarcely departed when Madame Bonacieux re-entered. She found Milady with a smiling countenance.

"Well," said the young woman, "what you dreaded has happened. This evening, or to-morrow, the cardinal will send some one to take you away."

"Who told you that, my dear?" asked Milady.

"I heard it from the mouth of the messenger himself."

"Come and sit down close to me," said Milady.

"Here I am."

"Wait till I assure myself that nobody hears us."

"Why all these precautions?"

"You shall know."

Milady arose, went to the door, opened it, looked in the corridor, and then returned and seated herself close to Madame Bonacieux.

"Then," said she, "he has well played his part."

"Who has?"

"He who just now presented himself to the abbess as a messenger from the cardinal."

"It was, then, a part he was playing?"

"Yes, my child."

"That man, then, was not —"

"That man," said Milady, lowering her voice, "is my brother."

"Your brother!" cried Madame Bonacieux.

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"No one must know this secret, my dear, but yourself. If you reveal it to any one in the world, I shall be lost, and perhaps yourself likewise."

"Oh, my God!"

"Listen. This is what has happened: My brother, who was coming to my assistance to take me away by force if it were necessary, met with the emissary of the cardinal, who was coming in search of me. He followed him. At a solitary and retired part of the road he drew his sword, and required the messenger to deliver up to him the papers of which he was the bearer. The messenger resisted; my brother killed him."

"Oh!" said Madame Bonacieux, shuddering.

"Remember, that was the only means. Then my brother determined to substitute cunning for force. He took the papers, and presented himself here as the emissary of the cardinal, and in an hour or two a carriage will come to take me away by the orders of his Eminence."

"I understand. It is your brother who sends this carriage."

"Exactly; but that is not all. That letter you have received, and which you believe to be from Madame de Chevreuse —"

"Well?"

"It is a forgery."

"How can that be?"

"Yes, a forgery; it is a snare to prevent your making any resistance when they come to fetch you."

"But it is D'Artagnan that will come."

"Do not deceive yourself. D'Artagnan and his friends are detained at the siege of Rochelle."

"How do you know that?"

"My brother met some emissaries of the cardinal in the

uniform of musketeers. You would have been summoned to the gate; you would have believed yourself about to meet friends; you would have been abducted, and conducted back to Paris."

"Oh, my God! My senses fail me amid such a chaos of iniquities. I feel, if this continues," said Madame Bonacieux, raising her hands to her forehead, "I shall go mad!"

"Stop —"

"What?"

"I hear a horse's steps; it is my brother setting off again. I should like to offer him a last salute. Come!"

Milady opened the window, and made a sign to Madame Bonacieux to join her. The young woman complied.

Rochefort passed at a gallop.

"Adieu, Brother!" cried Milady.

The chevalier raised his head, saw the two young women, and without stopping, waved his hand in a friendly way to Milady.

"The good George!" said she, closing the window with an expression of countenance full of affection and melancholy. And she resumed her seat, as if plunged in reflections entirely personal.

"Dear lady," said Madame Bonacieux, "pardon me for interrupting you; but what do you advise me to do? Good Heaven! You have more experience than I have. Speak; I will listen."

"In the first place," said Milady, "it is possible I may be deceived, and that D'Artagnan and his friends may really come to your assistance."

"Oh, that would be too much!" cried Madame Bonacieux; "so much happiness is not in store for me!"

"Then you comprehend it would be only a question of time, a sort of race, which should arrive first. If your

friends are the more speedy, you are saved ; if the satellites of the cardinal, you are lost."

"Oh, yes, yes, lost beyond redemption ! What then to do ? What to do ?"

"There would be a very simple means, very natural —"

"Tell me what !"

"To wait, concealed in the neighborhood, and assure yourself who are the men who come to ask for you."

"But where can I wait ?"

"Oh, there is no difficulty in that. I shall stop and conceal myself a few leagues hence, until my brother can rejoin me. Well, I take you with me ; we conceal ourselves, and wait together."

"But I shall not be allowed to go ; I am almost a prisoner."

"As they believe that I go in consequence of an order from the cardinal, no one will believe you anxious to follow me."

"Well ?"

"Well ! The carriage is at the door ; you bid me adieu ; you mount the step to embrace me a last time ; my brother's servant, who comes to fetch me, is told how to proceed ; he makes a sign to the postilion, and we set off at a gallop."

"But D'Artagnan ! D'Artagnan ! if he comes ?"

"Shall we not know it ?"

"How ?"

"Nothing easier. We will send my brother's servant back to Béthune, whom as I told you, we can trust. He shall assume a disguise, and place himself in front of the convent. If the emissaries of the cardinal arrive, he will take no notice ; if it is M. d'Artagnan and his friends, he will bring them to us."

"He knows them, then ?"

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"Doubtless. Has he not seen M. d'Artagnan at my house?"

"Oh, yes, yes; you are right. Thus all may go well, — all may be for the best; but we do not go far from this place?"

"Seven or eight leagues at most. We will keep on the frontiers, for instance; and at the first alarm we can leave France."

"And what can we do there?"

"Wait."

"But if they come?"

"My brother's carriage will be here first."

"If I should happen to be any distance from you when the carriage comes for you, — at dinner or supper, for instance?"

"Do one thing."

"What is that?"

"Tell your good superior that in order that we may be as much together as possible, you ask her permission to share my repast."

"Will she permit it?"

"What inconvenience can it be?"

"Oh, delightful! In this way we shall not be separated for an instant."

"Well, go down to her, then, to make your request. I feel my head a little confused; I will take a turn in the garden."

"Go; and where shall I find you?"

"Here, in an hour."

"Here, in an hour. Oh, you are so kind, and I am so grateful!"

"How can I avoid interesting myself for one who is so beautiful and so amiable? Are you not the beloved of one of my best friends?"

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"Dear D'Artagnan! Oh, how he will thank you!"

"I hope so. Now then, all is agreed; let us go down."

"You are going into the garden?"

"Yes."

"Go along this corridor, down a little staircase, and you are in it."

"Excellent; thank you!"

And the two women parted, exchanging charming smiles.

Milady had told the truth,—her head was confused, for her ill-arranged plans clashed one another like a chaos. She required to be alone that she might put her thoughts a little into order. She saw vaguely the future; but she stood in need of a little silence and quiet to give all her ideas, as yet confused, a distinct form and a regular plan.

What was most pressing was to get Madame Bonacieux away, and convey her to a place of safety, and there, if matters required, make her a hostage. Milady began to have doubts of the issue of this terrible duel, in which her enemies showed as much perseverance as she did animosity.

Besides, she felt as we feel when a storm is coming on,—that this issue was near, and could not fail to be terrible.

The principal thing for her then was, as we have said, to keep Madame Bonacieux in her power. Madame Bonacieux was the very life of D'Artagnan. This was more than his life, the life of the woman he loved; this was, in case of ill fortune, a means of temporizing and obtaining good conditions.

Now, this point was settled; Madame Bonacieux, without any suspicion, accompanied her. Once concealed

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with her at Armentières, it would be easy to make her believe that D'Artagnan had not come to Béthune. In fifteen days at most, Rochefort would be back ; besides, during that fifteen days she would have time to think how she could best avenge herself on the four friends. She would not be weary, thank God ! for she should enjoy the sweetest pastime such events could accord a woman of her character, — perfecting a beautiful vengeance.

Revolving all this in her mind, she cast her eyes around her, and arranged the topography of the garden in her head. Milady was like a good general who contemplates at the same time victory and defeat, and who is quite prepared, according to the chances of the battle, to march forward or to beat a retreat.

At the end of an hour she heard a soft voice calling her ; it was Madame Bonacieux's. The good abbess had naturally consented to her request ; and as a commencement, they were to sup together.

On reaching the courtyard, they heard the noise of a carriage which stopped at the gate.

Milady listened.

"Do you hear anything ?" said she.

"Yes, the rolling of a carriage."

"It is the one my brother sends for us."

"Oh, my God !"

"Come, come ! courage !"

The bell of the convent gate was sounded ; Milady was not mistaken.

"Go to your chamber," said she to Madame Bonacieux ;
"you have perhaps some jewels you would like to take."

"I have his letters," said she.

"Well, go and fetch them, and come to my apartment. We will snatch some supper ; we shall perhaps travel part of the night, and must keep our strength up."

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"Great God!" said Madame Bonacieux, placing her hand upon her bosom, "my heart beats so I cannot walk."

"Courage, courage! remember that in a quarter of an hour you will be safe; and think that what you are about to do is for *his* sake."

"Yes, yes, everything for him. You have restored my courage by a single word; go, I will rejoin you."

Milady ran up to her apartment quickly; she there found Rochefort's lackey, and gave him his instructions.

He was to wait at the gate; if by chance the musketeers should appear, the carriage was to set off as fast as possible, pass around the convent, and go and wait for Milady at a little village which was situated at the other side of the wood. In this case Milady would cross the garden and gain the village on foot. As we have already said, Milady was admirably acquainted with this part of France.

If the musketeers did not appear, things were to go on as had been agreed; Madame Bonacieux was to get into the carriage as if to bid her adieu, and she was to take away Madame Bonacieux.

Madame Bonacieux came in; and to remove all suspicion, if she had any, Milady repeated to the lackey, before her, the latter part of her instructions.

Milady asked some questions about the carriage. It was a chaise drawn by three horses, driven by a postilion; Rochefort's lackey would precede it, as courier.

Milady was wrong in fearing that Madame Bonacieux would have any suspicion. The poor young woman was too pure to suppose that any female could be guilty of such perfidy; besides, the name of the Comtesse de Winter, which she had heard the abbess pronounce, was wholly unknown to her, and she was even ignorant that a

woman had had so great and so fatal a share in the misfortune of her life.

"You see," said she, when the lackey had gone out, "everything is ready. The abbess suspects nothing, and believes that I am taken by order of the cardinal. This man goes to give his last orders; take the least thing, drink a finger of wine, and let us be gone."

"Yes," said Madame Bonacieux, mechanically, — "yes, let us be gone."

Milady made her a sign to sit down opposite, poured her a small glass of Spanish wine, and helped her to the wing of a chicken.

"See," said she, "if everything does not second us! Here is night coming on; by daybreak we shall have reached our retreat, and nobody can guess where we are. Come, courage! take something."

Madame Bonacieux ate a few mouthfuls mechanically, and just touched the glass with her lips.

"Come, come!" said Milady, lifting hers to her mouth, "do as I do."

But at the moment the glass touched her lips, her hand remained suspended; she heard something on the road which sounded like the rattling of a distant gallop. Then it drew nearer, and it seemed to her, almost at the same time, that she heard the neighing of horses.

This noise acted upon her joy like the storm which awakens the sleeper in the midst of a happy dream; she grew pale, and ran to the window, while Madame Bonacieux, rising all in a tremble, supported herself upon her chair to avoid falling. Nothing was yet to be seen, only they heard the galloping draw nearer.

"Oh, my God!" said Madame Bonacieux, "what is that noise?"

"That of either our friends or our enemies," said Mi-

lady, with her terrible coolness. "Stay where you are, I will tell you."

Madame Bonacieux remained standing, mute, motionless, and pale as a statue.

The noise became louder ; the horses could not be more than a hundred and fifty paces distant. If they were not yet to be seen, it was because the road made an elbow. The noise became so distinct that the horses might be counted by the rattle of their hoofs.

Milady gazed with all the power of her attention ; it was just light enough for her to see who was coming.

All at once, at the turning of the road she saw the glitter of laced hats and the waving of feathers ; she counted two, then five, then eight horsemen. One of them preceded the rest by double the length of his horse.

Milady uttered a stifled groan. In the first horseman she recognized D'Artagnan.

"Oh, my God, my God," cried Madame Bonacieux, "what is it ?"

"It is the uniform of the cardinal's Guards. Not an instant to be lost ! Fly, fly !"

"Yes, yes, let us fly !" repeated Madame Bonacieux, but without being able to make a step, glued as she was to the spot by terror.

They heard the horsemen pass under the windows.

"Come, then, come, then !" cried Milady, trying to drag the young woman along by the arm. "Thanks to the garden, we yet can flee ; I have the key, but make haste ! in five minutes it will be too late !"

Madame Bonacieux tried to walk, made two steps, and sank upon her knees. Milady tried to raise and carry her, but could not do it.

At this moment they heard the rolling of the carriage,

which at the approach of the musketeers set off at a gallop. Then three or four shots were fired.

"For the last time, will you come?" cried Milady.

"Oh, my God, my God! you see my strength fails me; you see plainly I cannot walk. Flee alone!"

"Flee alone, and leave you here? No, no, never!" cried Milady.

All at once she paused, a livid flash darted from her eyes; she ran to the table, emptied into Madame Bonacieux's glass the contents of a ring which she opened with singular quickness. It was a grain of a reddish color, which dissolved immediately.

Then, taking the glass with a firm hand, she said, "Drink. This wine will give you strength; drink!" And she put the glass to the lips of the young woman, who drank mechanically.

"This is not the way that I wished to avenge myself," said Milady, replacing the glass upon the table, with an infernal smile, "but, my faith! we do what we can!" And she rushed out of the room.

Madame Bonacieux saw her go without being able to follow her; she was like people who dream they are pursued, and who in vain try to walk.

A few moments passed; a great noise was heard at the gate. Every instant Madame Bonacieux expected to see Milady, but she did not return. Several times, with terror, no doubt, the cold sweat burst from her burning brow.

At length she heard the grating of the hinges of the opening gates; the noise of boots and spurs resounded on the stairs. There was a great murmur of voices which continued to draw near, amid which she seemed to hear her own name pronounced.

All at once she uttered a loud cry of joy, and darted

towards the door ; she had recognized the voice of D'Artagnan.

"D'Artagnan ! D'Artagnan !" cried she, "is it you ? This way ! this way !"

"Constance ? Constance ?" replied the young man, "where are you ? where are you ? My God !"

At the same moment the door of the cell yielded to a shock, rather than opened ; several men rushed into the chamber. Madame Bonacieux had sunk into an armchair, without the power of moving.

D'Artagnan threw down a yet smoking pistol which he held in his hand, and fell on his knees before his mistress. Athos replaced his in his belt ; Porthos and Aramis, who held their drawn swords in their hands, returned them to their scabbards.

"Oh, D'Artagnan, my beloved D'Artagnan ! You have come, then, at last ! You have not deceived me ! It is indeed thee !"

"Yes, yes, Constance. Reunited !"

"Oh, it was in vain she told me you would not come ! I hoped in silence. I was not willing to fly. Oh, I have done well ! How happy I am !"

At this word *she*, Athos, who had seated himself quietly, started up.

"*She !* What she ?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Why, my companion. She who out of friendship for me wished to take me from my persecutors. She who, mistaking you for the cardinal's Guards, has just fled away."

"Your companion !" cried D'Artagnan, becoming more pale than the white veil of his mistress. "Of what companion are you speaking, dear Constance ?"

"Of her whose carriage was at the gate ; of a woman who calls herself your friend ; of a woman to whom you have told everything."

THE DROP OF WATER.

"Her name, her name!" cried D'Artagnan. "My God, can you not remember her name?"

"Yes, it was pronounced in my hearing once. Stop — but — it is very strange — oh, my God, my head swims! I cannot see!"

"Help, help, my friends! her hands are icy cold," cried D'Artagnan. "She is ill! Great God, she is losing her senses!"

While Porthos was calling for help with all the power of his strong voice, Aramis ran to the table to get a glass of water; but he stopped at seeing the horrible alteration that had taken place in the countenance of Athos, who, standing before the table, his hair rising from his head, his eyes fixed in stupor, was looking at one of the glasses, and appeared a prey to the most horrible doubt.

"Oh!" said Athos, "oh, no, it is impossible! God would not permit such a crime!"

"Water, water!" cried D'Artagnan. "Water!"

"Oh, poor woman, poor woman!" murmured Athos, in a broken voice.

Madame Bonacieux opened her eyes under the kisses of D'Artagnan.

"She revives!" cried the young man. "Oh, my God, my God, I thank thee!"

"Madame!" said Athos, — "Madame, in the name of Heaven, whose empty glass is this?"

"Mine, Monsieur," said the young woman, in a dying voice.

"But who poured the wine for you that was in this glass?"

"She."

"But who is *she*?"

"Oh, I remember!" said Madame Bonacieux; "the Comtesse de Winter."

The four friends uttered one and the same cry, but that of Athos dominated all the rest.

At that moment the countenance of Madame Bonacieux became livid ; a fearful agony pervaded her frame, and she sank panting into the arms of Porthos and Aramis.

D'Artagnan seized the hands of Athos with an anguish difficult to be described.

"And what do you believe?" His voice was stifled by sobs.

"I believe everything," said Athos, biting his lips till the blood sprang to avoid sighing.

"D'Artagnan, D'Artagnan!" cried Madame Bonacieux, "where art thou? Do not leave me! You see I am dying!"

D'Artagnan released the hands of Athos which he still held clasped in both his own, and hastened to her. Her beautiful face was distorted with agony ; her glassy eyes had no longer their sight ; a convulsive shuddering shook her whole body ; the sweat rolled from her brow.

"In the name of Heaven, run, call! Aramis! Porthos! Call for help!"

"Useless!" said Athos, — "useless! For the poison which *she* pours there is no antidote."

"Yes, yes! Help, help!" murmured Madame Bonacieux ; "help!"

Then, collecting all her strength, she took the head of the young man between her hands, looked at him for an instant as if her whole soul passed into that look, and with a sobbing cry pressed her lips to his.

"Constance, Constance!" cried D'Artagnan.

A sigh escaped from the mouth of Madame Bonacieux, and dwelt for an instant on the lips of D'Artagnan. That sigh was the soul, so chaste and so loving, which re-ascended to heaven.



Death of Mme Bonacieux

D'Artagnan pressed nothing but a corpse in his arms. The young man uttered a cry, and fell by the side of his mistress as pale and as icy as herself.

Porthos wept ; Aramis pointed towards heaven ; Athos made the sign of the cross.

At that moment a man appeared in the doorway, almost as pale as those in the chamber. He looked around him and saw Madame Bonacieux dead, and D'Artagnan in a swoon. He appeared just at that moment of stupor which follows great catastrophes.

"I was not deceived," said he ; "here is M. d'Artagnan ; and you are his friends, MM. Athos, Porthos, and Aramis."

The persons whose names were thus pronounced looked at the stranger with astonishment. It seemed to all three that they knew him.

"Gentlemen," resumed the new-comer, "you are, as I am, in search of a woman who," added he, with a terrible smile, "must have passed this way, for I see a corpse."

The three friends remained mute, — for although the voice as well as the countenance reminded them of some one they had seen, they could not remember under what circumstances.

"Gentlemen," continued the stranger, "since you do not recognize a man who probably owes his life to you twice, I must name myself. I am Lord de Winter, brother-in-law of *that woman*."

The three friends uttered a cry of surprise.

Athos rose, and offering him his hand, "Be welcome, my Lord," said he, "you are one of us."

"I set out five hours after her from Portsmouth," said Lord de Winter. "I arrived three hours after her at Boulogne. I missed her by twenty minutes at St. Omer. Finally, at Lilliers I lost all trace of her. I was going about at random, inquiring of everybody, when I saw you

gallop past. I recognized M. d'Artagnan. I called to you, but you did not answer me ; I wished to follow you, but my horse was too much fatigued to go at the same pace with yours. And yet it appears, in spite of all your diligence, you have arrived too late."

"You see !" said Athos, pointing to Madame Bonacieux dead, and to D'Artagnan, whom Porthos and Aramis were trying to recall to life.

"Are they both dead ?" asked Lord de Winter, sternly.

"No," replied Athos, "fortunately M. d'Artagnan has only fainted."

"Ah, indeed, so much the better !" said Lord de Winter.

At that moment D'Artagnan opened his eyes. He tore himself from the arms of Porthos and Aramis, and threw himself like a madman on the corpse of his mistress.

Athos rose, walked towards his friend with a slow and solemn step, embraced him tenderly, and as he burst into violent sobs, he said to him with his noble and persuasive voice, "Friend, be a man ! Women weep for the dead ; men avenge them !"

"Oh, yes !" cried D'Artagnan, "yes ! If it be to avenge her, I am ready to follow you."

Athos profited by this moment of strength which the hope of vengeance restored to his unfortunate friend to make a sign to Porthos and Aramis to go and fetch the superior.

The two friends met her in the corridor, greatly troubled and much upset by such strange events ; she called some of the nuns, who against all monastic custom found themselves in the presence of five men.

"Madame," said Athos, passing his arm under that of D'Artagnan, "we abandon to your pious care the body of that unfortunate woman. She was an angel on earth

before being an angel in heaven. Treat her as one of your sisters. We will return some day to pray over her grave."

D'Artagnan concealed his face in the bosom of Athos, and sobbed aloud.

"Weep," said Athos, "weep, heart full of love, youth, and life! Alas, would I could weep like you!"

And he drew away his friend, as affectionate as a father, as consoling as a priest, noble as a man who has suffered much.

All five, followed by their lackeys leading their horses, took their way to the town of Béthune, whose outskirts they perceived, and stopped before the first inn they came to.

"But," said D'Artagnan, "shall we not pursue that woman?"

"Later," said Athos. "I have measures to take."

"She will escape us," replied the young man; "she will escape us, and it will be your fault, Athos."

"I will be accountable for her," said Athos.

D'Artagnan had so much confidence in the word of his friend that he lowered his head, and entered the inn without reply.

Porthos and Aramis regarded each other, not understanding this assurance of Athos.

Lord de Winter believed he spoke in this manner to soothe the grief of D'Artagnan.

"Now, gentlemen," said Athos, when he had ascertained there were five chambers free in the hôtel, "let every one retire to his own apartment. D'Artagnan needs to be alone, to weep and to sleep. I take charge of everything; be easy."

"It appears, however," said Lord de Winter, "if there are any measures to take against the countess, it concerns me; she is my sister-in-law."

“And me,” said Athos, — “she is my wife !”

D'Artagnan smiled, — for he understood that Athos was sure of his vengeance when he revealed such a secret. Porthos and Aramis looked at each other, and grew pale. Lord de Winter thought Athos was mad.

“Now, retire to your chambers,” said Athos, “and leave me to act. You must perceive that in my quality of a husband this concerns me. Only, D'Artagnan, if you have not lost it, give me the paper which fell from that man's hat, upon which is written the name of the village of—”

“Ah,” said D'Artagnan, “I comprehend ! that name written in her hand.”

“You see, then,” said Athos, “there is a God in heaven still !”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MAN IN THE RED CLOAK.

THE despair of Athos had given place to a concentrated grief which only rendered more lucid the brilliant mental faculties of that extraordinary man.

Possessed by one single thought, — that of the promise he had made, and of the responsibility he had taken, — he retired last to his chamber, begged the host to procure him a map of the province, bent over it, examined every line traced upon it, perceived that there were four different roads from Béthune to Armentières, and summoned the lackeys.

Planchet, Grimaud, Bazin, and Mousqueton presented themselves, and received clear, positive, and serious orders from Athos.

They must set out the next morning at daybreak, and go to Armentières, — each by a different route. Planchet, the most intelligent of the four, was to follow that by which the carriage had gone upon which the four friends had fired, and which was accompanied, as may be remembered, by Rochefort's servant.

Athos set the lackeys to work first because, since these men had been in the service of himself and his friends he had discovered in each of them different and essential qualities. Then, lackeys who ask questions inspire less mistrust than masters, and meet with more sympathy among those to whom they address themselves. Besides, Milady

knew the masters, and did not know the lackeys ; on the contrary, the lackeys knew Milady perfectly.

All four were to meet the next day at eleven o'clock. If they had discovered Milady's retreat, three were to remain on guard ; the fourth was to return to Béthune in order to inform Athos and serve as a guide to the four friends. These arrangements made, the lackeys retired.

Athos then arose from his chair, girded on his sword, enveloped himself in his cloak, and left the hôtel. It was nearly ten o'clock. At ten o'clock in the evening, it is well known, the streets in provincial towns are very little frequented. Athos nevertheless was visibly anxious to find some one of whom he could ask a question. At length he met a belated passenger, went up to him, and spoke a few words to him. The man he addressed recoiled with terror, and only answered the few words of the musketeer by pointing. Athos offered the man half a pistole to accompany him, but the man refused.

Athos then plunged into the street the man had indicated with his finger ; but arriving at four cross-roads, he stopped again, visibly embarrassed. Nevertheless, as the cross-roads offered him a better chance than any other place of meeting somebody, he stood still. In a few minutes a night-watch passed. Athos repeated to him the same question he had asked the first person he met. The night-watch evinced the same terror, refused, in his turn, to accompany Athos, and only pointed with his hand to the road he was to take.

Athos walked in the direction indicated, and reached the suburb situated at the opposite extremity of the city from that by which he and his friends had entered it. There he again appeared uneasy and embarrassed, and stopped for the third time.

Fortunately, a mendicant passed, who coming up to

Athos to ask charity, Athos offered him half a crown to accompany him where he was going. The mendicant hesitated at first, but at the sight of the piece of silver which shone in the darkness he consented, and walked on before Athos.

Arrived at the angle of a street, he pointed to a small house, isolated, solitary, and dismal. Athos went towards the house, while the mendicant, who had received his reward, left as fast as his legs could carry him.

Athos went round the house before he could distinguish the door, amid the red color in which the house was painted. No light appeared through the chinks of the shutters; no noise gave reason to believe that it was inhabited. It was dark and silent as the tomb.

Three times Athos knocked without receiving an answer. At the third knock, however, steps were heard inside. The door at length was opened, and a man appeared, of high stature, pale complexion, and black hair and beard.

Athos and he exchanged some words in a low voice, then the tall man made a sign to the musketeer that he might come in. Athos immediately profited by the permission, and the door was closed behind him.

The man whom Athos had come so far to seek, and whom he had found with so much trouble, introduced him into his laboratory, where he was engaged in fastening together with iron wire the dry bones of a skeleton. All the frame was adjusted except the head, which lay on the table.

All the rest of the furniture indicated that the dweller in this house occupied himself with the study of natural science. There were large bottles filled with serpents, ticketed according to their species; dried lizards shone like emeralds set in great squares of black wood, and

bunches of wild, odoriferous herbs, doubtless possessed of virtues unknown to common men, were fastened to the ceiling and hung down in the corners of the apartment. There was no family, no servant; the tall man alone inhabited this house.

Athos cast a cold and indifferent glance upon the objects we have described, and at the invitation of him whom he came to seek sat down near him.

Then he explained to him the cause of his visit, and the service he required of him. But scarcely had he expressed his request than the unknown, who remained standing before the musketeer, drew back with signs of terror, and refused. Then Athos took from his pocket a small paper, on which two lines were written, accompanied by a signature and a seal, and presented them to him who had made too prematurely these signs of repugnance. The tall man had scarcely read these lines, seen the signature, and recognized the seal, than he bowed to denote that he had no longer any objection to make, and that he was ready to obey.

Athos required no more. He arose, bowed, went out, returned by the same way he came, re-entered the hôtel, and went to his apartment.

At daybreak D'Artagnan entered the chamber, and demanded what was to be done.

"To wait," replied Athos.

Some minutes after, the superior of the convent sent to inform the musketeers that the burial would take place at mid-day. As to the poisoner, they had heard no tidings of her whatever, only she must have made her escape through the garden, on the sand of which her footsteps could be traced, and the door of which had been found shut. As to the key, it had disappeared.

At the hour appointed, Lord de Winter and the four



Athos and the executioner

friends repaired to the convent ; the bells tolled, the chapel was open, the grating of the choir was closed. In the middle of the choir the body of the victim, clothed in her novitiate dress, was exposed. On each side of the choir and behind the gratings opening into the convent, was assembled the whole community of the Carmelites, who listened to the divine service, and mingled their chant with the chant of the priests, without seeing the profane, or being seen by them.

At the door of the chapel D'Artagnan felt his courage fail anew, and returned to look for Athos ; but Athos had disappeared.

Faithful to his mission of vengeance, Athos had requested to be conducted to the garden ; and there upon the sand, following the light steps of this woman, who left sharp tracks wherever she went, he advanced towards the gate which led into the wood, and causing it to be opened, he went out into the forest.

Then all his suspicions were confirmed ; the road by which the carriage had disappeared encircled the forest. Athos followed the road for some time, his eyes fixed upon the ground ; slight stains of blood, which came from the wound inflicted upon the man who accompanied the carriage as a courier, or from one of the horses, dotted the road. At the end of three-quarters of a league, within fifty paces of Festubert, a larger blood-stain appeared ; the ground was trampled by horses. Between the forest and this accursed spot, a little behind the trampled ground, was the same track of small feet as in the garden ; the carriage had stopped here. At this spot Milady had come out of the wood, and entered the carriage.

Satisfied with this discovery which confirmed all his suspicions, Athos returned to the hôtel, and found Planchet impatiently waiting for him.

Everything was as Athos had foreseen.

Planchet had followed the road ; like Athos, he had discovered the stains of blood ; like Athos, he had noted the spot where the horses had halted. But he had gone farther than Athos, — for at the village of Festubert, while drinking at an inn, he had learned without needing to ask a question that the evening before, at half-past eight, a wounded man who accompanied a lady travelling in a post-chaise had been obliged to stop, unable to go farther. The accident was set down to the account of robbers, who had stopped the chaise in the wood. The man remained in the village ; the woman had had a relay of horses, and continued her journey.

Planchet went in search of the postilion who had driven her, and found him. He had taken the lady as far as Fromelles ; and from Fromelles she had set out for Armentières. Planchet took the cross-road, and by seven o'clock in the morning he was at Armentières.

There was but one tavern, the Post. Planchet went and presented himself as a lackey out of a place, who was in search of a situation. He had not chatted ten minutes with the people of the tavern before he learned that a woman had come there alone about eleven o'clock the night before, had engaged a chamber, had sent for the master of the hôtel, and told him she desired to remain some time in the neighborhood.

Planchet had no need to learn more. He hastened to the rendezvous, found the lackeys at their posts, placed them as sentinels at all the outlets of the hôtel, and came to find Athos, who had just received this information when his friends returned.

All their countenances were melancholy and gloomy, even the mild countenance of Aramis.

“What is to be done ?” asked D’Artagnan.

“To wait !” replied Athos.

Each retired to his own apartment.

At eight o'clock in the evening Athos ordered the horses to be saddled, and had Lord de Winter and his friends notified that they must prepare for the expedition.

In an instant all five were ready. Each examined his arms, and put them in order. Athos came down last, and found D'Artagnan already on horseback, and growing impatient.

“Patience !” cried Athos ; “one of our party is still wanting.”

The four horsemen looked round them with astonishment, for they sought vainly in their minds to know who this other person could be.

At this moment Planchet brought out Athos's horse , the musketeer leaped lightly into the saddle.

“Wait for me,” cried he, “I will soon be back,” and he set off at a gallop.

In a quarter of an hour he returned, accompanied by a tall man, masked, and wrapped in a large red cloak.

Lord de Winter and the three musketeers looked at one another inquiringly. Neither could give the others any information, for all were ignorant who this man could be ; nevertheless, they felt convinced that all was as it should be, as it was done by the order of Athos.

At nine o'clock, guided by Planchet, the little cavalcade set out, taking the route the carriage had taken.

It was a melancholy sight, — that of these six men, travelling in silence, each plunged in his own thoughts, sad as despair, gloomy as chastisement.

CHAPTER XXXV.

JUDGMENT.

It was a stormy and dark night ; vast clouds covered the heavens, concealing the stars ; the moon would not rise till midnight.

Occasionally, by the light of a flash of lightning which gleamed along the horizon, the road stretched itself before them, white and solitary ; the flash extinct, all remained in darkness.

Every minute Athos was forced to restrain D'Artagnan, constantly in advance of the little troop, and to beg him to keep in the line, which in an instant he again departed from. He had but one thought, — to go forward ; and he went.

They passed in silence through the little village of Festubert, where the wounded servant was, and then skirted the wood of Richebourg. At Herlier Planchet, who led the column, turned to the left.

Several times Lord de Winter, Porthos, or Aramis, tried to talk with the man in the red cloak ; but to every interrogation which they put to him he bowed, without response. The travellers then comprehended that there must be some reason why the unknown preserved such a silence, and ceased to address themselves to him.

The storm increased, the flashes succeeded one another more rapidly, the thunder began to growl, and the wind, the precursor of a hurricane, whistled in the plumes and the hair of the horsemen.

JUDGMENT.

The cavalcade trotted on more sharply.

A little before they came to Fromelles the storm burst. They spread their cloaks. There remained three leagues to travel, and they did it amid torrents of rain.

D'Artagnan took off his hat, and could not be persuaded to make use of his cloak. He found pleasure in feeling the water trickle over his burning brow and over his body, agitated by feverish shudders.

The moment the little troop passed Goskal and were approaching the Post, a man sheltered beneath a tree detached himself from the trunk with which he had been confounded in the darkness, and advanced into the middle of the road, putting his finger on his lips.

Athos recognized Grimaud.

"What's the matter?" cried Athos. "Has she left Armentieres?"

Grimaud made a sign in the affirmative. D'Artagnan ground his teeth.

"Silence, D'Artagnan!" said Athos. "I have charged myself with this affair. It is for me, then, to interrogate Grimaud."

"Where is she?" asked Athos.

Grimaud extended his hands in the direction of the Lys.

"Far from here?" asked Athos.

Grimaud showed his master his forefinger bent.

"Alone?" asked Athos.

Grimaud made the sign yes.

"Gentlemen," said Athos, "she is alone, within half a league of us, in the direction of the river."

"That's well," said D'Artagnan. "Lead us, Grimaud."

Grimaud took his course across the country, and acted as guide to the cavalcade.

At the end of five hundred paces, more or less, they came to a rivulet which they forded.

By the aid of the lightning they perceived the village of Erquinheim.

"Is she there, Grimaud?" asked Athos.

Grimaud shook his head negatively.

"Silence, then!" cried Athos.

And the troop continued their route.

Another flash illuminated all around them. Grimaud extended his arm, and by the bluish splendor of the fiery serpent they distinguished a little isolated house on the banks of the river, within a hundred paces of a ferry.

One window was lighted.

"Here we are!" said Athos.

At this moment a man who had been crouching in a ditch jumped up and came towards them. It was Mousqueton. He pointed his finger to the lighted window.

"She is there," said he.

"And Bazin?" asked Athos.

"While I watched the window, he guarded the door."

"Good!" said Athos. "You are good and faithful servants."

Athos sprang from his horse, gave the bridle to Grimaud, and advanced towards the window, after having made a sign to the rest of the troop to go towards the door.

The little house was surrounded by a low quickset hedge, two or three feet high. Athos sprang over the hedge and went up to the window, which was without shutters, but had the half-curtains closely drawn.

He mounted the skirting-stone that his eye might look over the curtain.

By the light of a lamp he saw a woman, wrapped in a dark mantle, seated upon a stool near a dying fire. Her elbows were placed upon a mean table, and she leaned her head upon her two hands, which were white as ivory.

He could not distinguish her countenance, but a sinister

smile passed over the lips of Athos. He was not deceived ; it was she whom he sought.

At this moment a horse neighed. Milady raised her head, saw close to the panes the pale face of Athos, and screamed.

Athos, perceiving that she knew him, pushed the window with his knee and hand. The window yielded. The squares were broken to shivers ; and Athos, like the spectre of vengeance, leaped into the room.

Milady rushed to the door and opened it. More pale and menacing than Athos, D'Artagnan stood on the threshold.

Milady recoiled, uttering a cry. D'Artagnan, believing she might have means of flight and fearing she should escape, drew a pistol from his belt ; but Athos raised his hand.

"Put back that weapon, D'Artagnan !" said he ; "this woman must be tried, not assassinated. Wait an instant, my friend, and you shall be satisfied. Come in, gentlemen."

D'Artagnan obeyed ; for Athos had the solemn voice and the powerful gesture of a judge sent by the Lord himself. Behind D'Artagnan entered Porthos, Aramis, Lord de Winter, and the man in the red cloak.

The four lackeys guarded the door and the window.

Milady had sunk into a chair, with her hands extended, as if to conjure this terrible apparition. Perceiving her brother-in-law, she uttered a terrible cry.

"What do you want ?" screamed Milady.

"We want," said Athos, "Charlotte Backson, who first was called Comtesse de la Fère, and afterwards Milady de Winter, Baroness of Sheffield."

"That is I ! that is I !" murmured Milady, in extreme terror ; "what do you want ?"

"We wish to judge you according to your crime," said Athos; "you shall be free to defend yourself. Justify yourself if you can. M. d'Artagnan, it is for you to accuse her first."

D'Artagnan advanced.

"Before God and before men," said he, "I accuse this woman of having poisoned Constance Bonacieux, who died yesterday evening."

He turned towards Porthos and Aramis.

"We bear witness to this," said the two musketeers, with one voice.

D'Artagnan continued: "Before God and before men, I accuse this woman of having attempted to poison me, in wine which she sent me from Villeroy, with a forged letter, as if that wine came from my friends. God preserved me, but a man named Brisemont died in my place."

"We bear witness to this," said Porthos and Aramis, in the same manner as before.

"Before God and before men, I accuse this woman of having urged me to the murder of the Baron de Wardes; but as no one else can attest the truth of this accusation, I attest it myself. I have done." And D'Artagnan passed to the other side of the room with Porthos and Aramis.

"Your turn, my Lord," said Athos.

The baron came forward.

"Before God and before men," said he, "I accuse this woman of having caused the assassination of the Duke of Buckingham."

"The Duke of Buckingham assassinated!" cried all present, with one voice.

"Yes," said the baron, "assassinated. On receiving the warning letter you wrote to me, I had this woman

arrested, and gave her in charge to a loyal servant. She corrupted this man ; she placed the poniard in his hand ; she made him kill the duke. And at this moment, perhaps, Felton is paying with his head for the crime of this fury ! ”

A shudder crept through the judges at the revelation of these unknown crimes.

“ That is not all,” resumed Lord de Winter. “ My brother, who made you his heir, died in three hours of a strange disorder which left livid traces all over the body. My sister, how did your husband die ? ”

“ Horror ! ” cried Porthos and Aramis.

“ Assassin of Buckingham, assassin of Felton, assassin of my brother, I demand justice upon you, and I swear that if it be not granted to me, I will execute it myself.”

And Lord de Winter ranged himself by the side of D'Artagnan, leaving the place free for another accuser.

Milady let her head sink between her two hands, and tried to recall her ideas, whirling in a mortal vertigo.

“ My turn,” said Athos, himself trembling as the lion trembles at the sight of the serpent, — “ my turn. I married that woman when she was a young girl ; I married her in opposition to the wishes of all my family ; I gave her my wealth, I gave her my name ; and one day I discovered that this woman was branded, — this woman was marked with a *fleur-de-lis* on her left shoulder.”

“ Oh,” said Milady, raising herself, “ I defy you to find any tribunal which pronounced that infamous sentence against me. I defy you to find him who executed it.”

“ Silence ! ” said a hollow voice. “ It is for me to reply to that ! ” And the man in the red cloak came forward in his turn.

“ What man is that ? What man is that ? ” cried Mi-

lady, suffocated by terror, her hair loosening itself, and rising above her livid countenance as if alive.

All eyes were turned towards this man, — for to all except Athos he was unknown.

Even Athos looked at him with as much stupefaction as the others, for he knew not how he could in any way find himself mixed up with the horrible drama then unfolded.

After approaching Milady with a slow and solemn step, so that the table alone separated them, the unknown took off his mask.

Milady for some time examined with increasing terror that pale face, enframed with black hair and whiskers, the only expression of which was icy impassibility. Then she suddenly cried, "Oh, no, no!" rising and retreating to the very wall. "No, no! it is an infernal apparition! It is not he! Help, help!" screamed she, turning towards the wall, as if she would tear an opening with her hands.

"Who are you, then?" cried all the witnesses of this scene.

"Ask that woman," said the man in the red cloak, "for you may plainly see she knows me!"

"The executioner of Lille, the executioner of Lille!" cried Milady, a prey to insensate terror, and clinging with her hands to the wall to avoid falling.

Every one drew back, and the man in the red cloak remained standing alone in the middle of the room.

"Oh, grace, grace, pardon!" cried the wretch, falling on her knees.

The unknown waited for silence, and then resumed, "I told you well that she would know me. Yes, I am the executioner of Lille, and this is my history."

All eyes were fixed upon this man, whose words were listened to with anxious attention.

“That woman was once a young girl, as beautiful as she is to-day. She was a nun in the convent of the Benedictines of Templemar. A young priest, with a simple and trustful heart, performed the duties of the church of that convent. She undertook his seduction, and succeeded ; she would have seduced a saint.

“Their vows were sacred and irrevocable. Their connection could not last long without ruining both. She prevailed upon him to leave the country ; but to leave the country, to fly together, to reach another part of France, where they might live at ease because unknown, money was necessary. Neither had any. The priest stole the sacred vases, and sold them ; but as they were preparing to escape together, they were both arrested.

“Eight days later she had seduced the son of the jailer, and escaped. The young priest was condemned to ten years of imprisonment, and to be branded. I was executioner of the city of Lille, as this woman has said. I was obliged to brand the guilty one ; and he, gentlemen, was my brother !

“I then swore that this woman who had ruined him, who was more than his accomplice, since she had urged him to the crime, should at least share his punishment. I suspected where she was concealed. I followed her, I caught her, I bound her ; and I imprinted the same disgraceful mark upon her that I had imprinted upon my poor brother.

“The day after my return to Lille, my brother in his turn succeeded in making his escape ; I was accused of complicity, and was condemned to remain in his place till he should be again a prisoner. My poor brother was ignorant of this sentence. He rejoined this woman ; they fled together into Berry, and there he obtained a little curacy. This woman passed for his sister.

"The Lord of the estate on which the chapel of the curacy was situated saw this pretended sister, and became enamoured of her, — amorous to such a degree that he proposed to marry her. Then she quitted him she had ruined for him she was destined to ruin, and became the Comtesse de la Fère — "

All eyes were turned towards Athos, whose real name that was, and who made a sign with his head that all was true which the executioner had said.

"Then," resumed he, "mad, desperate, determined to get rid of an existence from which she had stolen everything, honor and happiness, my poor brother returned to Lille, and learning the sentence which had condemned me in his place, surrendered himself, and hung himself that same night from the iron bar of the loophole of his prison.

"To do justice to them who had condemned me, they kept their word. As soon as the identity of my brother was proved, I was set at liberty.

"That is the crime of which I accuse her ; that is the cause for which she was branded."

"M. d'Artagnan," said Athos, "what is the penalty you demand against this woman ?"

"The punishment of death," replied D'Artagnan.

"My Lord de Winter," continued Athos, "what is the penalty you demand against this woman ?"

"The punishment of death," replied Lord de Winter.

"MM. Porthos and Aramis," repeated Athos, "you who are her judges, what is the sentence you pronounce upon this woman ?"

"The punishment of death," replied the musketeers, in a hollow voice.

Milady uttered a frightful shriek, and dragged herself along several paces upon her knees towards her judges.

Athos stretched out his hand towards her.

“Charlotte Backson, Comtesse de la Fère, Milady de Winter,” said he, “your crimes have wearied men on earth and God in heaven. If you know a prayer, say it, — for you are condemned, and you shall die.”

At these words, which left no hope, Milady raised herself in all her pride, and wished to speak ; but her strength failed her. She felt that a powerful and implacable hand seized her by the hair, and dragged her away as irrevocably as fatality drags humanity. She did not, therefore, even attempt the least resistance, and went out of the cottage.

Lord de Winter, D’Artagnan, Athos, Porthos, and Aramis, went out close behind her. The lackeys followed their masters, and the chamber was left solitary, with its broken window, its open door, and its smoky lamp burning sadly on the table.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

EXECUTION.

It was near midnight ; the moon, lessened by its decline, and reddened by the last traces of the storm, arose behind the little town of Armentières, which showed against its pale light the dark outline of its houses, and the skeleton of its high belfry. In front of them the Lys rolled its waters like a river of molten tin ; while on the other side was a black mass of trees, profiled on a stormy sky, invaded by large coppery clouds which created a sort of twilight amid the night. On the left was an old abandoned mill, with its motionless wings, from the ruins of which an owl threw out its shrill, periodical, and monotonous cry. On the right and on the left of the road, which the dismal procession pursued, appeared a few low, stunted trees, which looked like deformed dwarfs crouching down to watch men travelling at this sinister hour.

From time to time a broad sheet of lightning opened the horizon in its whole width, darted like a serpent over the black mass of trees, and like a terrible cimeter divided the heavens and the waters into two parts. Not a breath of wind now disturbed the heavy atmosphere. A death-like silence oppressed all nature. The soil was humid and glittering with the rain which had recently fallen, and the refreshed herbs sent forth their perfume with additional energy.

Two lackeys dragged Milady, whom each held by one arm. The executioner walked behind them, and Lord de

Winter, D'Artagnan, Porthos, and Aramis, walked behind the executioner. Planchet and Bazin came last.

The two lackeys conducted Milady to the bank of the river. Her mouth was mute ; but her eyes spoke with their inexpressible eloquence, supplicating by turns each of those on whom she looked.

Being a few paces in advance she whispered to the lackeys, "A thousand pistoles to each of you, if you will assist my escape ; but if you deliver me up to your masters, I have near at hand avengers who will make you pay dearly for my death."

Grimaud hesitated. Mousqueton trembled in all his members.

Athos, who heard Milady's voice, came sharply up. Lord de Winter did the same.

"Change these lackeys," said he ; "she has spoken to them. They are no longer sure."

Planchet and Bazin were called, and took the places of Grimaud and Mousqueton.

On the bank of the river the executioner approached Milady, and bound her hands and feet.

Then she broke the silence to cry out, "You are cowards, miserable assassins, — ten men combined to murder one woman. Beware ! If I am not saved I shall be avenged."

"You are not a woman," said Athos, coldly and sternly. "You do not belong to the human species ; you are a demon escaped from hell, whither we send you back again."

"Ah, you virtuous men !" said Milady ; "please to remember that he who shall touch a hair of my head is himself an assassin."

"The executioner may kill, without being on that account an assassin," said the man in the red cloak, rapping upon his immense sword. "This is the last judge ; that is all. *Nachrichter*, as say our neighbors, the Germans."

And as he bound her while saying these words, Milady uttered two or three savage cries, which produced a strange and melancholy effect in flying away into the night, and losing themselves in the depths of the woods.

"If I am guilty, if I have committed the crimes you accuse me of," shrieked Milady, "take me before a tribunal. You are not judges! You cannot condemn me!"

"I offered you Tyburn," said Lord de Winter. "Why did you not accept it?"

"Because I am not willing to die!" cried Milady, struggling. "Because I am too young to die!"

"The woman you poisoned at Béthune was still younger than you, Madame, and yet she is dead," said D'Artagnan.

"I will enter a cloister; I will become a nun," said Milady.

"You were in a cloister," said the executioner, "and you left it to ruin my brother."

Milady uttered a cry of terror and sank upon her knees. The executioner took her up in his arms and was carrying her towards the boat.

"Oh, my God!" cried she, "my God! are you going to drown me?"

These cries had something so heartrending in them that M. d'Artagnan, who had been at first the most eager in pursuit of Milady, sat down on the stump of a tree and hung his head, covering his ears with the palms of his hands; and yet, notwithstanding, he could still hear her cry and threaten.

D'Artagnan was the youngest of all these men. His heart failed him.

"Oh, I cannot behold this frightful spectacle!" said he. "I cannot consent that this woman should die thus!"

Milady heard these few words and caught at a shadow of hope.

"D'Artagnan, D'Artagnan!" cried she; "remember that I loved you!"

The young man rose and took a step towards her.

But Athos arose likewise, drew his sword, and placed himself in the way.

"If you take one step farther, D'Artagnan," said he, "we shall cross swords together."

D'Artagnan sank on his knees and prayed.

"Come," continued Athos, "executioner, do your duty."

"Willingly, Monseigneur," said the executioner; "for as I am a good Catholic, I firmly believe I am acting justly in performing my functions on this woman."

"That's well."

Athos made a step towards Milady.

"I pardon you," said he, "the ill you have done me. I pardon you for my blasted future, my lost honor, my defiled love, and my salvation forever compromised by the despair into which you have cast me. Die in peace!"

Lord de Winter advanced in his turn.

"I pardon you," said he, "for the poisoning of my brother, and the assassination of his Grace, Lord Buckingham. I pardon you for the death of poor Felton; I pardon you the attempts upon my own person. Die in peace!"

"And I," said M. d'Artagnan. "Pardon me, Madame, for having by a trick unworthy of a gentleman provoked your anger; and I, in exchange, pardon you the murder of my poor love and your cruel vengeance against me. I pardon you, and I weep for you. Die in peace!"

"I am lost!" murmured Milady in English. "I must die!"

Then she arose of herself, and cast around her one of those piercing looks which seemed to dart from an eye of flame.

She saw nothing ; she listened, and she heard nothing.

"Where am I to die?" said she.

"On the other bank," replied the executioner.

Then he placed her in the boat, and as he was going to set foot in it himself, Athos handed him a sum of silver.

"Here," said he, "is the price of the execution, that it may be plain we act as judges."

"That is correct," said the executioner ; "and now in her turn, let this woman see that I am not fulfilling my trade, but my debt."

And he threw the money into the river.

The boat moved off towards the left-hand shore of the Lys, bearing the guilty woman and the executioner ; all the others remained on the right-hand bank, where they fell on their knees.

The boat glided along the ferry-rope under the shadow of a pale cloud which hung over the water at that moment.

The troop of friends saw it gain the opposite bank ; the figures were defined like black shadows on the red-tinted horizon.

Milady during the passage had contrived to untie the cord which fastened her feet. On coming near the bank, she jumped lightly on shore and took to flight. But the soil was moist ; on reaching the top of the bank, she slipped and fell upon her knees.

She was struck, no doubt, with a superstitious idea : she conceived that Heaven denied its aid, and she remained in the attitude in which she had fallen, her head drooping and her hands clasped.

Then they saw from the other bank the executioner raise both his arms slowly ; a moonbeam fell upon the blade of the large sword. The two arms fell with a sudden force ; they heard the hissing of the cimeter and the



The Execution of Milady

cry of the victim, then a truncated mass sank beneath the blow.

The executioner then took off his red cloak, spread it upon the ground, laid the body in it, threw in the head, tied all up by the four corners, lifted it on his back, and entered the boat again.

In the middle of the stream he stopped the boat, and suspending his burden over the water cried in a loud voice, "Let the justice of God be done!" And he let the corpse drop into the depths of the waters, which closed over it.

Three days afterwards the four musketeers were in Paris; they had not exceeded their leave of absence, and that same evening they went to pay their customary visit to M. de Tréville.

"Well, gentlemen," said the brave captain, "I hope you have been well amused during your excursion."

"Prodigiously," replied Athos in the name of himself and his comrades.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE CARDINAL'S MESSENGER.

ON the sixth of the following month the king, in compliance with the promise he had made the cardinal to return to Rochelle, left his capital still in amazement at the news which began to spread itself of Buckingham's assassination.

Although warned that the man she had loved so much was in great danger, the queen, when his death was announced to her, would not believe the fact, and even imprudently exclaimed, "It is false ; he has just written to me !"

But the next day she was obliged to believe this fatal intelligence ; Laporte, detained in England, as every one else had been, by the orders of Charles I., arrived, and was the bearer of the duke's dying gift to the queen.

The joy of the king was lively. He did not even give himself the trouble to dissemble, and displayed it with affectation before the queen. Louis XIII., like every weak mind, was wanting in generosity.

But the king soon again became dull and indisposed ; his brow was not one of those that long remain clear. He felt that in returning to camp he should re-enter slavery ; nevertheless, he did return.

The cardinal was for him the fascinating serpent, and himself the bird which flies from branch to branch without power to escape.

The return to Rochelle, therefore, was profoundly dull. Our four friends, in particular, astonished their comrades ; they travelled together, side by side, with sad eyes and heads lowered. Athos alone from time to time raised his expansive brow ; a flash kindled in his eyes, and a bitter smile passed over his lips, then, like his comrades, he sank again into reverie.

As soon as the escort arrived in a city, when they had conducted the king to his quarters the four friends either retired to their own or to some secluded cabaret, where they neither drank nor played ; they only conversed in a low voice, looking around attentively to see that no one overheard them.

One day, when the king had halted to fly the magpie, and the four friends, according to their custom, instead of following the sport had stopped at a cabaret on the high-road, a man coming from Rochelle on horseback pulled up at the door to drink a glass of wine, and darted a searching glance into the room where the four musketeers were sitting.

"Holloa, M. d'Artagnan !" said he, "is not that you whom I see yonder ?"

D'Artagnan raised his head and uttered a cry of joy. It was the man he called his phantom ; it was his unknown of Meung, of the Rue des Fossoyeurs and of Arras.

D'Artagnan drew his sword, and sprang towards the door.

But this time, instead of avoiding him the unknown jumped from his horse, and advanced to meet D'Artagnan.

"Ah, Monsieur !" said the young man, "I meet you, then, at last ! This time you shall not escape me !"

"Neither is it my intention, Monsieur, for this time I was seeking you ; in the name of the king, I arrest you."

"How ! what do you say ?" cried D'Artagnan.

"I say that you must surrender your sword to me, Monsieur, and that without resistance. This concerns your head, I warn you."

"Who are you, then?" demanded D'Artagnan, lowering the point of his sword, but without yet surrendering it.

"I am the Chevalier le Rochefort," answered the other, "the equerry of M. le Cardinal Richelieu, and I have orders to conduct you to his Eminence."

"We are returning to his Eminence, Monsieur the Chevalier," said Athos, advancing; "and you will please to accept the word of M. d'Artagnan that he will go straight to Rochelle."

"I must place him in the hands of guards who will take him into camp."

"We will be his guards, Monsieur, upon our word as gentlemen; but likewise, upon our word as gentlemen," added Athos, knitting his brow, "M. d'Artagnan shall not leave us."

The Chevalier de Rochefort cast a glance backwards, and saw that Porthos and Aramis had placed themselves between him and the gate; he understood that he was completely at the mercy of these four men.

"Gentlemen," said he, "if M. d'Artagnan will surrender his sword to me, and join his word to yours, I shall be satisfied with your promise to convey M. d'Artagnan to the quarters of Monseigneur the Cardinal."

"You have my word, Monsieur, and here is my sword."

"This suits me the better," said Rochefort, "as I wish to continue my journey."

"If it is for the purpose of rejoining Milady," said Athos, coolly, "it is useless; you will not find her."

"What is become of her, then?" asked Rochefort, eagerly.

"Return to camp and you shall know."

Rochefort remained for a moment in thought; then, as they were only a day's journey from Surgères, whither the cardinal was to come to meet the king, he resolved to follow the advice of Athos, and go with them. Besides, this return offered him the advantage of watching his prisoner.

They resumed their routé.

On the morrow, at three o'clock in the afternoon, they arrived at Surgères. The cardinal there awaited Louis XIII. The minister and the king exchanged numerous caresses, felicitating each other upon the fortunate chance which had freed France from the inveterate enemy who set all Europe against her. After which, the cardinal, who had been informed that D'Artagnan was arrested, and who was anxious to see him, took leave of the king, inviting him to come the next day to view the work already done upon the dike.

On returning in the evening to his quarters at the bridge of La Pierre, the cardinal found, standing before the house he occupied, D'Artagnan, without his sword, and the three musketeers armed.

This time, as he was well attended, he looked at them sternly, and made a sign with his eye and hand for D'Artagnan to follow him.

D'Artagnan obeyed.

"We shall wait for you, D'Artagnan," said Athos, loud enough for the cardinal to hear him.

His Eminence bent his brow, stopped for an instant, and then kept on his way without uttering a single word.

D'Artagnan entered after the cardinal, and behind D'Artagnan the door was guarded.

His Eminence entered the chamber which served him

as a study, and made a sign to Rochefort to bring in the young musketeer.

Rochefort obeyed and retired.

D'Artagnan remained alone in front of the cardinal; this was his second interview with Richelieu, and he afterwards confessed that he felt well assured it would be his last.

Richelieu remained standing, leaning against the mantel-piece; a table was between him and D'Artagnan.

"Monsieur," said the cardinal, "you have been arrested by my orders."

"So they tell me, Monseigneur."

"Do you know why?"

"No, Monseigneur, for the only thing for which I could be arrested is still unknown to your Eminence."

Richelieu looked steadfastly at the young man.

"Holloa!" said he, "what does that mean?"

"If Monseigneur will have the goodness to tell me, in the first place, what crimes are imputed to me, I will then tell him the deeds I have really done."

"Crimes are imputed to you which have brought down far loftier heads than yours, Monsieur," said the cardinal.

"What, Monseigneur?" said D'Artagnan, with a calmness which astonished the cardinal himself.

"You are charged with having corresponded with the enemies of the kingdom; you are charged with having surprised State secrets; you are charged with having tried to thwart the plans of your general."

"And who charges me with this, Monseigneur?" said D'Artagnan, who had no doubt the accusation came from Milady, — "a woman branded by the justice of the country; a woman who has espoused one man in France and another in England; a woman who poisoned her second husband, and who attempted both to poison and assassinate me!"

"What do you say, Monsieur?" cried the cardinal, astonished; "and of what woman are you speaking thus?"

"Of Milady de Winter," replied D'Artagnan, — "yes, of Milady de Winter, of whose crimes your Eminence is doubtless ignorant, since you have honored her with your confidence."

"Monsieur," said the cardinal, "if Milady de Winter has committed the crimes you lay to her charge, she shall be punished."

"She is punished, Monseigneur."

"And who has punished her?"

"We."

"She is in prison?"

"She is dead."

"Dead!" repeated the cardinal, who could not believe what he heard, — "dead! Did you not say she was dead?"

"Three times she attempted to kill me, and I pardoned her; but she murdered the woman I loved. Then my friends and I took her, tried her, and condemned her."

D'Artagnan then related the poisoning of Madame Bonacieux in the convent of the Carmelites at Béthune, the trial in the isolated house, and the execution on the banks of the Lys.

A shudder crept through the body of the cardinal, who did not shudder readily.

But all at once, as if undergoing the influence of an unspoken thought, the countenance of the cardinal, till then gloomy, cleared up by degrees, and recovered perfect serenity.

"So," said the cardinal, in a tone that contrasted strongly with the severity of his words, "you have constituted yourselves judges, without remembering that they who punish without license to punish are assassins?"

"Monseigneur, I swear to you that I never for an instant

had the intention of defending my head against you. I willingly submit to any punishment your Eminence may please to inflict upon me. I do not hold life dear enough to be afraid of death."

"Yes, I know you are a man of a stout heart, Monsieur," said the cardinal, with a voice almost affectionate; "I can therefore tell you beforehand you shall be tried, and even condemned."

"Another might reply to your Eminence that he had his pardon in his pocket. I content myself with saying: Command, Monseigneur; I am ready."

"Your pardon?" said Richelieu, surprised.

"Yes, Monseigneur," said D'Artagnan.

"And signed by whom, — by the king?" And the cardinal pronounced these words with a singular expression of contempt.

"No, by your Eminence."

"By me? You are insane, Monsieur!"

"Monseigneur will doubtless recognize his own handwriting."

And D'Artagnan presented to the cardinal the precious piece of paper which Athos had forced from Milady, and which he had given to D'Artagnan to serve him as a safeguard.

His Eminence took the paper, and read in a slow voice, dwelling upon every syllable:—

Dec. 3, 1627.

It is by my order and for the good of the State that the bearer of this has done what he has done.

RICHELIEU.

The cardinal, after having read these two lines, sank into a profound reverie; but he did not return the paper to D'Artagnan.

"He is meditating by what sort of punishment he shall

cause me to die," said the Gascon to himself. "Well, my faith! he shall see how a gentleman can die."

The young musketeer was in excellent disposition to die heroically.

Richelieu still continued thinking, rolling and unrolling the paper in his hands.

At length he raised his head, fixed his eagle look upon that loyal, open, and intelligent countenance, read upon that face, furrowed with tears, all the sufferings its possessor had endured in the course of a month, and reflected for the third or fourth time how much there was in that youth of twenty-one years before him, and what resources his activity, his courage, and his shrewdness might offer to a good master. On the other side, the crimes, the power, and the infernal genius of Milady had more than once terrified him. He felt something like a secret joy at being forever relieved of this dangerous accomplice.

Richelieu slowly tore the paper which D'Artagnan had generously relinquished.

"I am lost!" said D'Artagnan to himself. And he bowed profoundly before the cardinal, like a man who says, "Lord, thy will be done!"

The cardinal approached the table, and without sitting down, wrote a few lines upon a parchment of which two-thirds were already filled, and affixed his seal.

"That is my condemnation," thought D'Artagnan; "he will spare me the *ennui* of the Bastille, or the tediousness of a trial. That's very kind of him."

"Here, Monsieur," said the cardinal to the young man. "I have taken from you one *carte blanche* to give you another. The name is wanting in this commission; you can write it yourself."

D'Artagnan took the paper hesitatingly, and cast his eyes over it; it was a lieutenant's commission in the Musketeers.

D'Artagnan fell at the feet of the cardinal.

"Monseigneur," said he, "my life is yours ; henceforth dispose of it. But this favor which you bestow upon me I do not merit. I have three friends who are more meritorious and more worthy —"

"You are a brave youth, D'Artagnan," interrupted the cardinal, tapping him familiarly on the shoulder, charmed at having vanquished this rebellious nature. "Do with this commission what you will ; only remember, though the name be blank, it is to you I give it."

"I shall never forget it," replied D'Artagnan. "Your Eminence may be certain of that."

The cardinal turned, and said in a loud voice, "Roche-fort !" The chevalier, who no doubt was near the door, entered immediately.

"Roche-fort," said the cardinal, "you see M. d'Artagnan. I receive him among the number of my friends. Greet each other, then ; and be wise if you wish to preserve your heads."

Roche-fort and D'Artagnan coolly greeted each other with their lips ; but the cardinal was there, observing them with his vigilant eye.

They left the chamber at the same time.

"We shall meet again, shall we not, Monsieur ?"

"When you please," said D'Artagnan.

"An opportunity will come," replied Roche-fort.

"Hey ?" said the cardinal, opening the door.

The two men smiled at each other, shook hands, and saluted his Eminence.

"We were beginning to grow impatient," said Athos.

"Here I am, my friends," replied D'Artagnan ; "not only free, but in favor."

"Tell us about it."

"This evening ; but for the moment, let us separate."

Accordingly, that same evening D'Artagnan repaired to

the quarters of Athos, whom he found in a fair way to empty a bottle of Spanish wine, — an occupation which he religiously accomplished every night.

D'Artagnan related what had taken place between the cardinal and himself, and drawing the commission from his pocket, said, "Here, my dear Athos, this naturally belongs to you."

Athos smiled with one of his sweet and expressive smiles.

"Friend," said he, "for Athos this is too much; for the Comte de la Fère it is too little. Keep the commission; it is yours. Alas! you have purchased it dearly enough."

D'Artagnan left Athos's chamber and went to that of Porthos. He found him clothed in a magnificent dress covered with splendid embroidery, admiring himself before a glass.

"Ah, ah! is that you, dear friend?" exclaimed Porthos. "How do you think these garments fit me?"

"Wonderfully," said D'Artagnan; "but I come to offer you a dress which will become you still better."

"What?" asked Porthos.

"That of a lieutenant of Musketeers."

D'Artagnan related to Porthos the substance of his interview with the cardinal, and said, taking the commission from his pocket, "Here, my friend, write your name upon it and become my chief."

Porthos cast his eyes over the commission and returned it to D'Artagnan to the great astonishment of the young man.

"Yes," said he, — "yes, that would flatter me very much; but I should not have time enough to enjoy the distinction. During our expedition to Béthune the husband of my duchess died; so, my dear, the coffer of the defunct holding out its arms to me, I shall marry the

widow. Look here! I was trying on my wedding suit. Keep the lieutenancy, my dear, keep it."

The young man then entered the apartment of Aramis. He found him kneeling before a *priedieu*, with his head leaning on an open prayer-book.

He described to him his interview with the cardinal, and said, for the third time drawing his commission from his pocket, "You, our friend, our intelligence, our invisible protector, accept this commission. You have merited it more than any of us by your wisdom and your counsels, always followed by such happy results."

"Alas, dear friend!" said Aramis, "our late adventures have disgusted me with military life. This time my determination is irrevocably taken. After the siege I shall enter the house of the Lazarists. Keep the commission, D'Artagnan; the profession of arms suits you. You will be a brave and adventurous captain."

D'Artagnan, his eye moist with gratitude though beaming with joy, went back to Athos, whom he found still at table contemplating the charms of his last glass of Malaga by the light of his lamp.

"Well," said he, "they likewise have refused me."

"That, dear friend, is because nobody is more worthy than yourself."

He took a quill, wrote the name of D'Artagnan in the commission, and returned it to him.

"I shall then have no more friends," said the young man. "Alas! nothing but bitter recollections."

And he let his head sink upon his hands, while two large tears rolled down his cheeks.

"You are young," replied Athos; "and your bitter recollections have time to change themselves into sweet remembrances."

EPILOGUE.

ROCHELLE, deprived of the assistance of the English fleet, and of the diversion promised by Buckingham, surrendered after a siege of a year. On the 28th of October, 1628, the capitulation was signed.

The king made his entrance into Paris on the 23d of December of the same year. He was received in triumph, as if he came from conquering an enemy and not Frenchmen. He entered by the Faubourg St. Jacques, under verdant arches.

D'Artagnan took possession of his command. Porthos left the service, and in the course of the following year married Madame Coquenard; the coffer so much coveted contained eight hundred thousand livres.

Mousqueton had a magnificent livery, and enjoyed the satisfaction of which he had been ambitious all his life, — that of standing behind a gilded carriage.

Aramis, after a journey into Lorraine, disappeared all at once, and ceased to write to his friends; they learned at a later period through Madame de Chevreuse, who told it to two or three of her intimates, that, yielding to his vocation, he had retired into a convent, — only into which, nobody knew.

Bazin became a lay brother.

Athos remained a musketeer under the command of D'Artagnan till the year 1633, at which period, after a journey he made to Touraine, he also quitted the service,

under the pretext of having inherited a small property in Roussillon.

Grimaud followed Athos.

D'Artagnan fought three times with Rochefort, and wounded him three times.

"I shall probably kill you the fourth," said he to him, holding out his hand to assist him to rise.

"It is much better both for you and for me to stop where we are," answered the wounded man. "*Corbleu!* I am more your friend than you think, — for after our very first encounter, I could by saying a word to the cardinal have had your throat cut!"

They this time embraced heartily, and without retaining any malice.

Planchet obtained from Rochefort the rank of sergeant in the Piedmont regiment.

M. Bonacieux lived on very quietly, wholly ignorant of what had become of his wife, and caring very little about it. One day he had the imprudence to recall himself to the memory of the cardinal. The cardinal had him informed that he would provide for him so that he should never want for anything in future. In fact, M. Bonacieux, having left his house at seven o'clock in the evening to go to the Louvre, never appeared again in the Rue des Fossoyeurs; the opinion of those who seemed to be best informed was that he was fed and lodged in some royal castle, at the expense of his generous Eminence.

THE END.

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